

Parental Caregivers Lose Sleep when Children have Chronic Illness

Stress, Need for Nightly Medical Care Can Impact Parent Mood and Functioning

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DENVER, CO — Parents of children with [atopic dermatitis](#), [asthma](#) or on ventilator assistance report poor [sleep](#) quality, insomnia and chronic sleep disruption, according to researchers at National Jewish Health. In total, caregivers of children with these chronic illnesses average about an hour less sleep per night than caregivers of healthy children. The study, published online in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, shows that sleep disturbances are influenced by illness characteristics and nighttime caregiving requirements.



“While it’s logical that parents of children with chronic illness have poorer sleep, it was important to find that they wake up for different reasons, which depend on the child’s disease,” said lead author [Lisa Meltzer, PhD](#), an associate professor of pediatrics at National Jewish Health. “Knowing the reasons for caregiver sleep disturbance and the severity of them can help medical providers better support families.”

Caregivers of children with ventilator assistance and atopic dermatitis had higher rates of sleep disruptions due to caregiving. Asthma caregivers reported more sleep disruptions from stress about the child’s health. The findings suggest that caregivers of children with atopic dermatitis and on ventilator assistance may benefit from additional overnight caregiving help. Parents of children with asthma may benefit from learning strategies to reduce stress and worry.

Compared to parents of healthy children, caregivers of children with chronic illnesses were four to eight times more likely to average less than six hours of sleep per night. Regularly getting less than six hours of sleep per night is considered chronic partial sleep deprivation, and has been shown to negatively affect mood, fatigue and performance. Additionally, chronic deficient sleep has been linked to increased weight gain and risk of long-term health issues.

“Parenting a child with a chronic illness goes above and beyond normal parenting,” said Dr. Meltzer. “So it is very important for health care providers to ask about parental sleep and well-being, providing family support as needed.”

National Jewish Health is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 120 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the [media resources page](#).

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

William Allstetter

303.398.1002

allstetterw@njhealth.org

Adam Dormuth

303.398.1082

dormutha@njhealth.org