

## **Good Night, Sleep Tight—and Symptom-Free**

Often, parents assume a cough at night is simply from “drainage” from allergies. But a chronic cough at night can be a sign of asthma, especially if it doesn’t resolve with an oral antihistamine such as Claritin or Zyrtec. Nocturnal asthma is the formal term for symptoms that worsen during sleep. Untreated, it not only makes for a miserable night, but lack of sleep can harm a developing child’s ability to stay alert the next day.

Coughing is the most common symptom in children suffering from asthma during sleep, compared to wheezing and trouble breathing in adults. The symptoms can become bad enough to wake a child up in need of his or her quick-relief inhaler.

Let the doctor know if asthma wakes your child up more than one or two nights a month. Frequent nighttime symptoms are a sign of poor asthma control. Your child’s doctor might need to adjust his or her treatment. Asthma medication can be divided into two groups: rescue or quick-relief medication such as albuterol for the treatment of symptoms and controller medication which is taken daily to prevent the wheezing and need for the quick relief treatment.

Often, mild symptoms become “normal” for a child and both the child and the family don’t recognize ongoing asthma symptoms.

On your own, you can help your child sleep like a dream by taking these steps to control nighttime symptoms:

- **Check peak flow at night.** A drop of 15 percent or more from the usual peak flow is a sign of nocturnal asthma
- **Kick dust mites out of bed.** Encase the mattress, box spring, and pillows in special allergen-proof covers. Wash bedding weekly in hot water, and dry it in a hot dryer.