

sleep like a pro

young athletes edition



OFFICIAL SLEEP PARTNER OF
MANCHESTER CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

A 10-Step Guide to Helping Your Child Sleep Better for Sports

Parents of children in grass-roots sports often focus on training sessions, healthy meals and having the right kit. But one of the biggest influences on your child’s performance happens after they get home: **sleep**.

During sleep, the body repairs muscles, restores energy and supports healthy growth, while the brain strengthens the skills and decision-making learned in training.

Good sleep is linked to better performance, faster recovery, lower injury risk, improved concentration and a more positive mood. It can also help children stay healthy and enjoy their football.

We’re teamed up with our sleep expert, Kathryn Pinkham, to share a 10-step guide using the science-backed strategies that are important for performance.

The good news is that better sleep can come from small, consistent habits. This guide shares 10 simple ways parents can help their child get the sleep they need to perform, recover and thrive, both on and off the pitch.



Set the body clock

Don’t force an early bedtime

If your child has stayed up later than usual for training, it can be tempting to send them to bed much earlier the following evening to “catch up” on lost sleep. However, if they simply aren’t sleepy yet, this can lead to them lying awake feeling frustrated.

Parent tip:

Keep morning wake-up times as close to normal as possible. A consistent start to the day helps reset the body clock far more effectively than trying to catch up with an extra-early bedtime.



Start the Day with Natural Light

Morning daylight is one of the most powerful ways to regulate sleep. It helps your child’s brain recognise when it’s time to be awake, making it easier to feel sleepy that evening.

Parent tip:

Encourage 10-15 minutes outdoors before school or on the way to football whenever possible.

Support recovery

Help Them Switch into Recovery Mode

Training and matches can leave children physically energised and mentally excited. A short wind-down helps the body transition from “game mode” into recovery mode.

Parent tip:

Encourage a warm shower, light stretching, hydration and some quiet time before bed. If they’re still buzzing from the game, let them chat about it before lights out.

Fuel Recovery

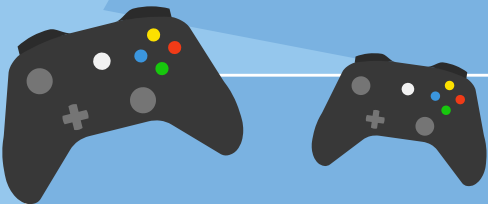
Food and hydration play an important role in both recovery and sleep. Going to bed too hungry or too full can make it harder to get a good night’s sleep.

Parent tip:

After football offer a balanced meal or snack and encourage plenty of hydration, avoiding large meals or lots of drinks just before bed.



Reduce sleep disruptors



Reduce Evening Screen Time

Phones, tablets and gaming can keep the brain alert and delay bedtime.

Parent tip:

Aim for a screen-free period of 30-60 minutes before bed, particularly after evening training, to help the mind switch off ready for bed.

Make Space to Talk

Football doesn’t just tire the body, it stimulates the mind too. Whether they’re replaying a last-minute goal, worrying about a mistake or feeling excited about the next match, children often take those thoughts to bed with them. Giving them a chance to talk things through earlier in the evening can help their mind settle before bedtime.

Parent tip:

Spend five or ten minutes chatting during the day. Let them share what went well, anything they’re worried about, and what they’re looking forward to. Giving those thoughts space during the day makes them less likely to pop up when they’re trying to fall asleep.

Use Naps Wisely

Extra sleep can help after busy football weekends, but long naps may make it harder to fall asleep at bedtime.

Parent tip:

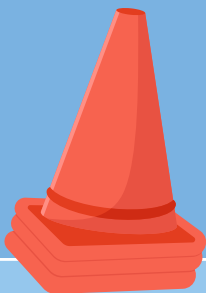
If your child needs a nap, keep it to around 20 minutes earlier in the afternoon.

Avoid Late Caffeine

Caffeine can stay in the body for several hours, making it harder to fall asleep and reducing sleep quality.

Parent tip:

Be mindful of caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee and energy drinks later in the day. Water or milk are better choices after football.



Build lasting habits

Prioritise Sleep During Busy Football Weeks

Sleep is where muscles recover, energy is restored and new football skills are strengthened. It should be viewed as part of training, not separate from it.

Parent tip:

Where possible, avoid overloading evenings after football and protect enough time for a full night’s sleep before the next session or match.

Focus on Progress, Not Perfection

Healthy sleep habits are built over time. Small, consistent changes are more effective than trying to make everything perfect overnight.

Parent tip:

Choose one or two habits that work for your family and stick with them. Consistency is what makes the biggest difference

