



## What are Nightmares?

Nightmares are **scary dreams** that awaken children and often make them afraid to go back to sleep. They usually occur during the REM (rapid eye movement) period which happens during the last third of sleep and so are most common in the very early hours of the morning. Although adults also experience nightmares, because young children are learning new information and absorbing new experiences at an exceptionally rapid rate, they are more **prone to bad dreams and waking up** during the night.

From about the age of 6 months, it is normal for children to have the occasional bad dream. For example a toddler going to kindergarten for the first time may have **nightmares about being separated from his or her parents**. The older child may have nightmares about real dangers or even death.

Children waking from a bad dream are usually fully conscious and aware of their surroundings, although they may be a little confused and obviously upset. This can be very distressing for both parent and child and the **interrupted and disturbed sleep** that can result often leaves everyone feeling groggy the next day.

(For more info on adult nightmares, see Section 6 below)

## What is the difference between night terrors and nightmares?

Nightmares (especially very traumatic ones) are sometimes confused with **night terrors**. While they are in fact very similar, they do have distinct differences. Nightmares occur during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep (also known as dream sleep) which is more common towards the later part of the night or early hours of the morning.

This differs from **night terrors** which occur during slow wave sleep or deep sleep. This deep sleep state tends to take place about 90 minutes into sleep and so **night terrors** generally occur in the early hours of the night. Another difference is that a child having a nightmare will often wake up and have a memory of the bad dream.

Children waking from a nightmare may be able to tell you vivid details of what had scared them and may even be too scared to go back to sleep or go to bed the following night. On the other hand, a child having a **night terror** is generally only aware of the panic and feelings of **fear** and very little else.

The **fear** is usually not accompanied by a feared situation or object (as in a nightmare) because it occurs during a dream-less state, and once the child goes back to sleep, he or she often doesn't remember anything the next morning.

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Thrashing movements and screaming are fairly common during a night terror, while markedly uncommon during a nightmare.

## When should I worry about my child's nightmares?

Nightmares are a normal part of childhood and if they are infrequent or occur during understandably distressing life events they are generally not something to be concerned about. Most children grow out of their nightmares; however, if any of the following apply to your child you may consider consulting your health care practitioner or psychologist:

- If the nightmares seem to be getting worse or happening more often;
- If night time fears start to interfere with daytime activities and regularly disrupt sleep patterns
- If the nightmares persist 6 months after a traumatic experience and occur with other [post-traumatic stress](#) symptoms
- If your child seems increasingly anxious at all times
- If your child shows any signs of jerking, stiffening or drooling. This may indicate a seizure rather than a nightmare
- If you feel that excessive family [stress](#) may be a factor
- If you have any other fears, questions or concerns about your child's nightmares

## What causes Nightmares?


There are a number of reasons why children have nightmares. Mostly, they are a **normal part of growing up** and they reflect the difficulties, problems and [fears](#) that most children struggle with. In most kids, nightmares are a result of developing new fears such as of spiders or monsters, starting a new school or daycare, trying to conceptualize a new life problem or experience. Other causes include:

- Physical conditions such as illness or fever
- Unresolved psychological conflicts such as chaotic home environment, overheard arguments, [anxiety](#), some form of loss or grief
- A traumatic experience or [stressful](#) life events
- [Post traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#)
- Violence on television
- Side effects of certain medications such as antihistamines, decongestants, beta blockers, and antidepressants, as well as withdrawal from addictive drugs.

## Help for Nightmares


Most children grow out of their nightmares or learn to deal with them better as they get older. As children begin to understand that **no harm actually comes from a nightmare** they recognize that dreams both good and bad are products of their own minds. Nightmares then become less distressing for both the child and the parents. Treatment options may include:

**Drug treatments:** Drug treatments are seldom necessary and generally not a



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### Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

suitable treatment option for children. If sleep patterns are severely disrupted, a doctor may prescribe sleeping tablets however; these can be highly addictive and may cause other side-effects or withdrawal symptoms.

**Note:** *It is strongly advised that you thoroughly research any prescription medication and its side-effects before deciding on what would be the best option for your child. For more information on these drugs see [www.rx.com](http://www.rx.com)*

**Psychotherapy:** In more serious cases, or situations where nightmares follow a traumatic or stressful experience, some form of psychotherapy may be necessary. Child therapy or counseling can help a child deal with unresolved anxieties and stressful events. Play therapy or art therapy is especially useful when dealing with young children who lack the ability to appropriately communicate their thoughts and emotions.

**Re-scripting:** This is a simple yet effective technique that parents can do with their children to help combat bad dreams. By simply discussing the dream and letting the child come up with different and happy endings, the child will soon learn that they have the power in their dreams. Some suggestions are humorous endings, empowering endings or endings where love wins out in the end. Alternatively, get the child to draw a picture of the nightmare the following day and ceremoniously shred the piece of paper.

Gentle soothing and affectionate reassurance; anxiety-reducing techniques such as deep breathing; as well as natural calming herbal or homeopathic remedies that encourage sleep and reduce fear are also effective in dealing with nightmares.

Nightmares can be very disruptive for both children and their parents, especially when little ones are difficult to console and parents are tired. Natural herbal and homeopathic remedies are a gentle, yet effective way to help settle your child after a nightmare, while also **helping to restore [healthy sleep patterns](#)** in the child who suffers from frequent night time disturbances. A number of natural ingredients are traditionally used to provide comfort and to settle your little one in times of fear and anxiety.

In therapeutic potencies, certain homeopathic ingredients such as Aconite, Kali phos and Nat. sulph can be very helpful, while herbal remedies such as Passiflora Incarnata and Chamomile are safe for children, have a **calming and relaxing effect** and are especially useful in cases of sudden fright and nervous restlessness. To ensure maximum safety and effectiveness, remember always to source your natural remedies from a reputable company who offers support and advice especially in the case of children.

## Tips for coping with your child's Nightmares

- **Get your child into a healthy bedtime routine.** A quiet unwinding time that lets your child slowly calm down, both physically and mentally, is often essential for a good night's sleep. Reduce stimulation by dimming the lights and talking in hushed tones. This time is also perfect for a bed-time story (not a scary one!) or casual conversation about the day just passed. These bed-time rituals will become comforting to your child and often provide a sense of security.
- **Monitor TV watching.** Ensure that your child is not watching violent or scary TV programs as this is a well known cause of nightmares. Although

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your child may enjoy watching these programs, they may be causing undue anxiety. Even some cartoons screened for kids are filled with violence and scary monsters that may affect a sensitive child. Also monitor TV and computer games.

- **Keep your child active during the day.** A child that is energetic and kept active during the day will fall asleep faster and enjoy a deeper sleep with fewer night-time interruptions.
- Avoid high sugar intake or other stimulants. Even though pudding before bed may be a household habit, keeping sugar intake low especially before bed will help reduce nightmares. Also watch out for chocolate as it contains caffeine and acts as a mental stimulant.
- **Leave your child's door open or leave a night light on.** Even if your child has stopped sleeping with the light on, a small night light left on can be reassuring on waking up from a nightmare and able to recognize where he or she is. If they can't sleep with a light on, then leave their door open and keep a corridor light on to reassure them that the rest of the family are near by.
- **Introduce a comfort item.** This could be a favorite soft toy or a comforting blanket that will make your child feel safe and secure. You can also be imaginative here and introduce a make-believe fairy that chases bad dreams away. Sometimes just knowing that they are safe and protected goes a long way to reduce nightmare induced [anxiety](#).
- **Provide sympathetic reassurance.** Hugs, verbal reassurance that it was just a dream and an attentive listening ear go a long way in comforting a distressed child after a nightmare. Sit with your child until calm, and encourage going back to sleep in his or her own bed.
- **Don't spend too long searching for the 'monster'.** If your child is convinced there's a monster under the bed, a quick look and reassurance is sufficient. Too much searching will make it seem that monsters really do exist!
- **Rewrite the bad dream with your child.** Encourage your child to talk about the bad dream and together, come up with happier alternate endings. Let them know that they have the power to change a scary dream into a happy dream – they hold the script!
- **Resolve underlying issues.** The following day, ask your child to talk about the dream, draw a picture of what happened or act it out. Look for clues about any issues that may have brought the nightmares about. Sometimes children's nightmares are quite literal and can be traced back to a scary experience or a fear that needs to be resolved. Have a conversation about these underlying issues and resolve any conflict or uncertainties that they have on the subject.

## More information on Nightmares

While distressing nightmares are more commonly associated with children, adults can experience them too. Many adults have nightmares that leave them **feeling anxious and disturbed upon waking** and can even leave the individual feeling drained and tired after a full night's rest. As with children, many nightmares in adults are caused by life stressors and anxieties that reflect in the sub-conscious mind during sleep.

In many cases, recording and examining your nightmares can provide great opportunities for self-exploration and reflection. **Unresolved issues surface in our dreams** and sometimes these issues need to be addressed. For many people, keeping a dream journal can be quite a therapeutic process that can allow for much



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positive change. Other common causes of nightmares in adults include:

- Alcohol or drug use
- Adverse reaction to prescription medication including some heart medication, antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin, antihistamines, appetite suppressants such as fenfluramine, antidepressants, and ulcer drugs such as cimetidine.
- Nicotine patches left on over night
- Withdrawal symptoms from alcohol, cigarettes or certain medications, especially sleeping pills
- Negative emotions such as grief, guilt, anxiety and depression
- Physical conditions such as illness or fever
- Pregnancy
- [Post traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#)
- [Sleep disorders](#) such as [sleep apnea](#)

## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future

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disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

## **Related Natural Remedies:**



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**Bad Dream Sprinkles**: Night-time comfort for young children in a child-safe supplement

Bad Dream Sprinkles is a 100% natural remedy **formulated especially for toddlers and children by a Clinical Psychologist**. The remedy contains a combination of gentle yet effective herbal ingredients traditionally used to maintain night time comfort and **support healthy sleep patterns**. Bad Dream Sprinkles may be used in the middle of the night, as well as just before bedtime.

Safe and easy to administer, the pleasant tasting granules of Bad Dream Sprinkles are simply sprinkled on the tongue and rapidly absorbed in the mouth – **making them easy to administer** to young children. The granules are sweet tasting and fine enough to be taken even by babies and small children, many of whom come to associate the taste with comfort and security.

Like all Native Remedies products, Bad Dream Sprinkles has been developed with care by our practicing Clinical Psychologist and is manufactured according to the highest pharmaceutical standards. Individual ingredients are well-researched and have been specially chosen for their high safety profile in children's health.

[Learn more about Bad Dream Sprinkles](#)

**MindSoothe**: Promote balanced mood and feelings of wellbeing.

MindSoothe is a 100% safe, non-addictive, natural herbal remedy that has been especially formulated by a Clinical Psychologist for adults and teens, and comes in a compact capsule form, making it easy to take.

MindSoothe can be used to safely maintain emotional health, balanced mood, [emotional wellness](#) and systemic harmony in the brain and [nervous system](#), without harmful side effects.

This remedy contains a selection of herbs known for their [calming](#) and supportive function in maintaining brain and nervous system health, [emotional](#) balance and overall wellbeing.

[Learn more about MindSoothe](#)

**MindSoothe Jr.**: Promotes emotional and psychological health and balanced mood in children.

MindSoothe Jr. is a 100% safe, non-addictive, natural herbal remedy, especially formulated by a Clinical Psychologist for children.

MindSoothe Jr. supports the brain's **natural ability to regulate emotion and mood** – maintaining production of essential brain hormones and chemicals related to nervous system health and emotional well-being, thereby helping to maintain balanced mood and optimum performance. MindSoothe Jr. can be used to safely promote well being and naturally support health and systemic balance in the brain and nervous system - **without any harmful side effects** or risk of addiction.

Instead of the capsules used in the adult formula, MindSoothe Jr. comes in

convenient and easy to administer drop form – making it simple to adjust dosage for different age groups.

The formula remains true to the **whole spectrum method** of herbal extraction, ensuring the bio-availability and balance of all the active ingredients contained in the remedy. This method of manufacture maintains all active ingredients in perfect balance – exactly as nature intended!

[Learn more about MindSoothe Jr.](#)

**Sleep Tonic**: To promote healthy sleep patterns

Sleep Tonic is a remedy containing a combination of three, **cellular-supporting tissue salts** especially selected for their effect on brain and nervous system health. This combination of tissue salts can be used regularly in a general capacity to **promote systemic balance in the brain and nervous system**, as well as in conjunction with other remedies to maintain therapeutic effectiveness.

**Tissue salts**, also called **cell salts** or **biochemic salts**, are **composed of minerals which occur naturally at a cellular level** in our bodies and all organic matter on earth, such as plants, rocks and soil. Just like the bricks and mortar of a wall, tissue salts are the building blocks for cells. All in all, **twelve tissue salts have been identified as being essential components of all body cells** and without which, true health is not possible. Each tissue salt plays a different, yet vital role in maintaining cellular health in all the organs and systems of the body.

**Sustaining the correct balance of tissue salts in the body** is similar to the structural engineer laying good foundations when building a house. This process of tissue salt balance, called Biochemistry, was first explored by Dr. Scheussler, a prominent 19th Century German physician. Dr. Scheussler discovered that, when reduced to ashes, each human cell contained 12 minerals or biochemic tissue salts. He believed that these minerals should be present in all living cells (and in perfect balance) to support good health and well-being. This knowledge is still highly respected today and practiced by Homeopaths and Naturopaths all over the world.

Making sure that all the cells of your brain and nervous system are functioning effectively will also mean that you will enhance the bio-availability of all supplements, remedies and even nutrients in your diet – thereby maximizing all your brain health efforts! And because our tissue salts are naturally occurring in the body and manufactured to ensure safe, yet optimum potency, they are safe to use for all ages (from infancy to old age) – as well as during pregnancy!

[Learn more about Sleep Tonic](#)

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