

Weighted Blankets for Children and Young People – A Guide for Parents/ Carers



Weighted blankets are now widely available for purchase, and this guidance may help parents or carers who are thinking of privately purchasing one.

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) have published “*Weighted blankets for children and adults – A guide for occupational therapists*”. RCOT, January 2023. The information in this guide has been adapted from the RCOT document.

Weighted blankets are an example of a sensory-based intervention used in someone’s natural environment to support their physical and emotional regulation. Occupational therapists may use them as part of a wider approach to help people of all ages take part in daily life activities that matter to them. The deep pressure stimulation they provide is thought to positively impact sleep, anxiety and cognitive processes by reducing the body’s levels of stress and arousal.

Studies have had mixed results, showing that children and adults like using weighted blankets but there is limited evidence that they improve sleep. They may help reduce anxiety, meaning people are better able to take part in important daily life activities.

Before using a weighted blanket and to help you make an informed choice on whether a weighted blanket is right for your child/young person consider the following: -

Risks

It is recommended that before using a weighted blanket, you consider the risks related to the child’s or young person’s use of the weighted blanket. This should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- physical, learning or other difficulties (including age-related factors) that might affect the child's understanding of the purpose and use of the weighted blanket and their ability to remove it on their own
- health conditions that might affect your child's or young person's ability to breathe, regulate their temperature and/or remove the blanket when they want to or maintain skin integrity
- mental health factors, such as an eating disorder or suicide risk, that might affect how someone uses a weighted blanket
- side effects of medication or any illness affecting levels of alertness that might suggest that a weighted blanket should not be used

If your child/young person has any of these risk factors, a weighted blanket may not be suitable.

Guidance for the safe use of the weighted blanket

- Parents and carers looking to use a weighted blanket should follow the manufacturer's instructions on weight and size. These usually say a weighted blanket should not be more than 10% of the person's weight. If a different weight/size is recommended, the reason for this should be justified.
- Weighted blankets can be made and filled with different materials. Consider whether certain materials are suitable for your child or should be avoided.
- Make sure the blanket meets relevant health and safety standards, usually indicated by a safety mark such as the CE mark.
- Clean and maintain the blanket in line with the manufacturer's instructions. Infection control should also be taken into consideration.
- Give clear and accessible information about how to use the blanket to your child or young person and other people involved in their care.
- The risk related to your child's or young person's use of the weighted blanket will determine the level of supervision they need when using a weighted blanket. This should be communicated with others involved in their care.
- If the weighted blanket is used at night, we recommend that it doesn't hang over the bed sides and that it's removed when your child or young person is asleep.
- Weighted blankets must not be used as a restraint.

Observations during use and warning signs:

Watch for any negative reactions shown by your child when under the blanket. These could include: -

- Difficulty breathing

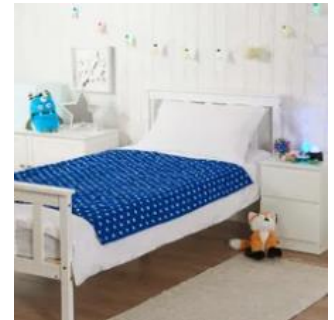
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- Nausea
- Increase in temperature
- Any behavioral or physical reactions demonstrating the child's discomfort or anxiety

STOP use straight away if any of the above observed!

Specific precautions for nighttime use: -

- It is important that your child can move around by themselves under the weighted blanket and be able to remove the blanket easily.
- Always remind your child that they can remove the blanket at any time if it is feeling too heavy or hot.



Alternative

You may also wish to consider a compression sheet/ blanket as an alternative. These are made of stretchy fabric and wraps around the mattress. This can be left on the bed overnight, are breathable and less constrictive than a weighted blanket.

Scan the QR code if you would like to read *“Weighted blankets for children and adults – A guide for occupational therapists”*. RCOT, January 2023.

