

TEENAGE SLEEP

SLEEP FOR WELLBEING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



THE NEED FOR SLEEP

Sleep is food for the brain. It is especially important for teenagers as it directly impacts mental and physical development.

Teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep. This coincides with an increasing demand on their time from school (including homework), sports and other extracurricular and social activities. In addition, teenagers become more interested in TV, computers, the media and internet activities as well as stimulating foods - all of which can lead to difficulty falling asleep, nightmares and disruptions to their sleep quantity and quality.

The challenge facing parents of teenagers is putting in place routines that ensure they get their required amount of sleep.



Poor sleep can make teenagers feel moody and perform poorly. Sleepiness can also make it difficult for them to get along with family and friends and can hurt scores on school exams, on the court or on the field.

SOCIAL JET LAG

Keeping irregular sleep and wake times due to a busy social life has been shown to take a hefty toll on health. Staying out late and sleeping in at the weekend desynchronises the internal clock, resulting in tiredness at the start of the school week. Many teenagers remain groggy over a number of days. 'Social Jet-Lag' is one of the terms used to quantify the discrepancy that often arises between circadian and social clocks, which results in chronic sleep loss.

The immediate effects of social jetlag include poor memory and reaction times, which would explain that familiar Monday morning feeling of sluggishness.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

It's important for teenagers to make sleep a priority. Teenagers can:

- Develop a sleep plan
- Keep a regular sleep and wake schedule (including weekends)
- Learn to 'wind down' at least an hour before bed
- Finish schoolwork early
- Exercise
- Limit screen time to at least an hour before bed (the light can activate your mind)
- Avoiding heavy meals and caffeinated beverages before bed
- Turn bedrooms in to a sleep haven

SLEEP FRUSTRATION

Have you ever witnessed your teenager stressed the night before an important exam or school event? Performance anxiety can stimulate the release of the stress hormone cortisol, increasing alertness and making it difficult for them to sleep. Learning to quiet your mind can lead to restful sleep and better performance the next day.



CONSEQUENCES FOR TEENS

Not getting enough sleep or having sleep difficulties can:

- Limit their ability to learn, listen, concentrate and solve problems
- Lead to aggressive or inappropriate behavior
- Cause them to eat too much or eat unhealthy foods
- Make them more prone to pimples
- Contribute to illness
- Mimic intoxication - Impacting the safe use of equipment, for example driving, and increased engagement in risk taking behaviour (dis-inhibition)

SIGNS OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION AT SCHOOL

- Being late for class
- Feeling sleepy during the day
- Moodiness/grumpiness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Decreased learning of new facts and tasks
- Poor academic grades/performance at school

IT'S TOUGH TO BE A TEENAGER

Many people believe teenagers who require frequent 'sleep-ins' to be lazy. However, biological sleep patterns amongst adolescents can shift toward later times for both sleeping and waking. This means it is natural for teens to not be able to fall asleep before 11:00pm, impacting their desire for later waking times.

Further information:

<http://breathingspacehealth.com.au>

<http://eprints.vu.edu.au/467/> (This is a comprehensive e-book on teenage sleep)

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep>

<http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets-a-z/199-teenage-sleep.html>