

HEALTHY SLEEP IN TEENAGERS

WE KNOW THAT SLEEP IS IMPORTANT AT ALL STAGES OF LIFE, BUT RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR TEENAGERS.

Why do teens need a good night's sleep?

In 2006, the American Sleep Poll showed a clear link: teens who got enough sleep did better in school. Their performance in sports and after-school activities improved. They had fewer behavioral problems.

Teens who got enough sleep were less likely to struggle with their weight, which meant they were less likely to have weight-related illnesses as they grew up. Teens who weren't sleepy were less likely to have a fatal motor vehicle collision.

This study, as well as many others, showed a clear link between teens that weren't getting enough sleep and diagnoses of ADHD, experiences with behavioral problems, and health concerns such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart conditions, obesity, depression, and anxiety.

Why do teens struggle to get enough sleep?

Like adults, teens have a hard time putting down their electronic devices and going to sleep.

Many teenagers also struggle with the social pressures of the weekend. Kids stay up late on Friday and Saturday, then sleep in on Saturday and Sunday morning, which makes it harder to go to bed on time

Sunday night. Getting up Monday morning is a struggle, so kids start their week with a sleep deficit. Teens who smoke, use alcohol, drugs or drink a lot of caffeine, often struggle with going to bed on time.

There is also a natural circadian rhythm (body clock) shift that happens in adolescence and encourages teens to stay up later making it more difficult to wake up early. Teenagers can also struggle with a sleep disorder called delayed sleep-wake phase disorder, which is a more extreme version of this circadian rhythm shift. If kids are very busy trying to balance after school activities, sports, homework and family commitments, it can be very difficult for them to get everything done in time to relax and go to bed.

Getting a good night's sleep can be difficult for anyone, but it is particularly hard for teenagers.

What signs help parents determine if their teenager has a possible sleep disorder?

- Inconsistent sleep schedule
- Difficulty waking up in the morning and not feeling well rested
- Habitual snoring
- Difficulty coping with changes and emotions in an age-appropriate way

Some warning signs to be aware of in your teenager include:

- *Your teenager is regularly exhausted in the morning.*
- *Health concerns.* If a teenager is depressed, anxious, or is showing signs of high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart problems, a complete sleep evaluation is suggested.
- *Sleep disorders are more likely in some kids.* If your teenager has ADHD, down syndrome, asthma, allergies, obesity, autism, or epilepsy, there is a higher than normal chance that their sleep is disturbed.
- *Changes in behavior, or performance in school or activities.* If a normally happy teen begins to act withdrawn, moody, or seems to sleep all the time, or if a good student begins to struggle with workload or their activities, sleep should be one of the problems that parents consider.
- *A shifted circadian rhythm.* The teen wakes up after 8 hours of sleep on the weekend and feels rested and ready to go, but can't get to bed at a regular time on school nights.

What can parents do to help?

Parents who recognize that their kids aren't sleeping well can help them get a better night's rest and improve their overall health for years to come. Good sleep hygiene includes:

- Giving teens a dark, cool, quiet sleeping space.
- Encouraging them to complete their homework early.
- Having them avoid TV and digital devices at least one hour before going to bed
- Encouraging them to set their phone on silent so that notifications will not wake them up.
- Having them avoid eating within a few hours of bedtime.
- Keeping their weeknight and weekend bedtime basically the same.

If these suggestions do not make a difference, see a sleep specialist. Many of the sleep disorders that arise in teenagers, such as narcolepsy, restless legs syndrome, and sleep apnea, can be treated.

Why does it all matter?

Sleep disorders in teens are common and underdiagnosed. Parents too often dismiss exhaustion as just one of those things that kids go through, when in fact exhaustion and sleep deprivation at this age can have profound effects through a teenager's life.



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit sleepeducation.org

By treating sleep disorders as they arise, parents can see:

- Improvements in their teenager's overall mood and ability to cope with stress.
- Better mental health overall, with less depression and anxiety
- An improved ability to learn, resulting in better performance in school and sports.
- Safer driving and fewer risky behaviors
- Improvements in their child's overall health.

When parents treat sleep disruptions as the serious problems that they are, they're setting their child up for a longer, healthier life. If you have concerns about your teenager's sleep patterns, contact their healthcare provider.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.



Sample Questions:

Why does my child seem tired all the time?

Why might my teenagers grades be slipping?
