



Whose kids? Our Kids!

# TEENS AND SLEEP

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**W**ith all of the demands that teens face today, getting enough sleep can be difficult. Inadequate sleep can affect your teen's mood, health, and safety. Research has linked poor sleep habits to increased rates of depression and attention problems. Lack of sleep may change teens' metabolism, putting them at increased risk for obesity. Recent research links a lack of sleep with poor school performance. And not getting enough sleep can make driving more dangerous. Teen drivers are one of the groups at highest risk for driving accidents caused by drowsiness or fatigue.

**For many teens, weekend nights mean even less sleep.**

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that teens get 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night. However, with a biological tendency to stay up late, early school start times, and a busy schedule, it is not surprising that most U.S. teens are not getting enough sleep. The average teen gets 7 hours of sleep per night. For many teens, weekend nights mean even less sleep.

**Here are some signs that your teen is not getting enough sleep:**

- Naps for longer than 45 minutes
- Sleeps in two or more hours on weekends
- Wakes up with difficulty in the morning

- Yawns throughout the day
- Depends on caffeine
- Falls asleep in class
- Concentrates poorly
- Becomes irritable, anxious or easily frustrated

## Factors that may contribute to your teen's sleep

### Circadian rhythm shift

One biological factor that influences the times and the amount we sleep is our circadian rhythm. Circadian rhythms are daily cycles that dictate when we feel drowsy or awake based on our exposure to light. Recent research has uncovered a shift in biology at adolescence that makes it hard for teens to fall asleep at night, which then makes it hard for them to wake up in the morning.

### Early school start times

Middle school and high school generally start earlier than elementary schools, which conflicts with your teen's natural tendency to sleep later. This conflict has been the topic of many recent policy debates. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that middle and high schools start after 8:30 a.m. If you have a choice, consider a school with a later start time or talk with local school officials about a later start time. When schools adopt a later start time, teens' grades improve. That extra sleep in the morning helps teens pay attention, remember what they have learned, and feel better throughout the day.

**Teenagers require more sleep, yet most get 1 to 2 hours less than when they were younger!**

## Overscheduling

Participating in extracurricular activities has many long-term benefits for teens, but balancing these activities with home life, work, and school can put a strain on your teen's sleep. Encourage your teen to find a balance between all of these activities while still promoting sleep as a priority. Teens who are considered "high achievers" or who participate in multiple extracurricular activities are at increased risk for sleep problems.

## Drinking caffeine

Drinking caffeinated beverages like soda, coffee, or energy drinks is common for teens today. Consuming caffeine any time after lunch can push back the time that your teen falls asleep at night, which leads to less sleep and an increased desire for caffeine the following day. Caffeine is a stimulant, and it is addictive. Many forms of caffeine also contain extra sugar, which is not good for growing bodies. For example, a 20-ounce soda can contain 15 to 20 teaspoons of sugar! Many health professionals do not recommend caffeine for teens, but if your teen does drink caffeine, limit consumption to a single serving of coffee or tea in the morning, and avoid extra sugar.

**"I can't go to sleep at 10:00 p.m. All I do is lay there wide awake for hours."**



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## Parents make a difference!

Parents can promote more sleep for their teens by providing a sleep environment that is cool, quiet, and dark at night. Remove all electronic distractions at bedtime. Using a phone, tablet, or computer before bed, or having a TV in the bedroom has been linked with sleep difficulties in teens. In fact, looking at the bright screen of a phone, TV, or computer late at night tricks our brains into thinking that it is daytime. Using social media, watching shows, playing video games, or listening to music can also excite, rather than relax your teen, and make falling asleep difficult. Reserve the bedroom for sleeping and quiet activities like reading.

## When to contact a doctor or health professional

Not all teen sleep problems are solved by modifying the sleep environment, cutting back on caffeine, or other lifestyle changes. If your teen's sleep problem interferes with his or her daily functioning, and environmental changes have not helped, ask a trusted health professional (school nurse or family doctor) about the situation.

## Tips to help your teen get enough sleep

- ▶ Establish consistent bedtimes and waking times throughout the week. Research has shown that sleeping in on weekend mornings does not erase the negative effects of sleep deficits during the week. The optimal amount of sleep for teens is 8 to 10 hours each night.
- ▶ Help your teen make a habit of keeping their smartphone outside of the bedroom, perhaps in a common area where you also keep your phone while you sleep. Get your teen an alarm clock so they can wake up without their phone.
- ▶ Pay attention to staying up late and sleeping in on weekends. If teens get off of their regular schedules, it will be hard to go to sleep on school nights.
- ▶ Help your teen sleep more deeply by keeping the bedroom as dark as possible. Cover the light coming from digital clocks.
- ▶ Help your teen wake more easily in the morning by opening the curtains and letting natural sunlight into the room. This will allow your teen to wake slowly, making morning struggles less difficult.
- ▶ Encourage your teen to exercise. Teens who participate in moderate exercise fall asleep and stay asleep more easily. Moderate exercise is 30 to 60 minutes of cardiovascular activity, such as running or swimming, 4 to 7 days per week.
- ▶ Prioritize sleep for your whole family. Often, it's more than just the teenager in the family who is not getting enough sleep. Most adults need about 8 hours of sleep each night. Remember that sleep is not a luxury; it's vital so the body and mind can function normally. When everybody is well-rested, family interactions are likely to be more pleasant.
- ▶ Be patient and expect changes in sleep habits to take some time. Research has shown that sleep patterns develop slowly and can be difficult to change, so don't give up too soon and allow a couple of weeks to adjust to new sleep times or routines.



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