



Parenting for Prevention: Teens & Sleep

About Teen Sleep

Good sleep is an essential component to overall teen health & wellness.

A person's **circadian rhythm** (think of it as an internal biological clock) signals when our body is ready for sleep and ready to wake up.

There is a **natural, biological shift** that occurs in the teenage years. As a result, teens are more alert at night and have difficulty settling into sleep, impacting their ability to wake easily and refreshed.

A main factor that affects how sleepy or how alert we are at any given time is **how long it has been since we have last slept**. This is called the **sleep-wake balance**. If we stay awake for too long, our sleep-wake balance will be off, making us sleepy.

Teens tend to have **irregular sleep patterns across the week**, typically staying up later and sleeping in longer on the weekends. This can affect their biological clocks, hurt the quality of their sleep, and disrupt beneficial sleep during the school week.

Sleep affects learning. The brain consolidates and practices what we learn during the day. Learning continues to take place while teens (and adults!) are asleep. That means that sleep after a lesson or new task is learned is just as important as getting a good night's rest before a test or performing a new skill.

What Parents Need to Know

According to the National Sleep Foundation, **children sleep better when parents establish rules, limit technology & set a good example about sleep practices.**

1. Enforcing rules helps children get more sleep. When parents set and enforce rules about limiting caffeine intake, use of electronics, and bedtime curfews, children sleep longer – up to 1 hour.
2. Turning electronics off while sleeping makes a difference. Nearly 3 out of 4 children ages 6 to 17 have at least one electronic device in the bedroom while sleeping. Children who leave electronic devices on at night get less sleep - a difference of up to nearly 1 hour on average per night.
3. Setting a good example encourages children to do the same. Parents with healthy sleep habits tend to have children with healthy sleep habits. Nearly 65% of children whose parents have at least one electronic device in their bedroom also have at least one device in their own bedroom, but only 24% of children have a device in their bedroom if their parent does not.

Adapted from: <https://sleepfoundation.org/media-center/press-release/national-sleep-foundation-2014-sleep-america-poll-finds-children-sleep>

FAST FACTS



The developing teen brain needs between 8-10 hours of sleep each night.

Overall, less than 10% of teens said they were meeting guidelines for sleep. (2007-2013 US YRBS)

Teens who sleep fewer than 8 hours per school night report higher stress levels than teens who sleep at least 8 hours per school night.



Melatonin is a hormone that signals to the body it's time for rest. Just 2 hours with an electronic, luminous device (laptop, tablet, cell phone, etc.) suppresses melatonin enough to lead to a delayed bedtime for teens.



Remind your teen to never drive when feeling tired. Crashes related to drowsy driving take the lives of more than 1,550 people every year. These crashes are most often caused by young people under the age of 25.

Warning Signs of Sleep Deprivation: What to Look For

Teens are often unaware of how much sleep they really need (8-10 hours per night) or unable to recognize when their own bodies are telling them they need more rest. Many teens are so busy with schoolwork, sports, activities, work and friends that they compromise good health by sacrificing beneficial sleep. Sleep deprivation can impact a teen in different ways. If your teen exhibits any of these behaviors, talk with him or her about strategies for establishing a good sleep routine.

American Academy of Pediatrics: Let Them Sleep - AAP Recommends Delaying Start Times of Middle and High Schools to Combat Teen Sleep Deprivation

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/let-them-sleep-aap-recommends-delaying-start-times-of-middle-and-high-schools-to-combat-teen-sleep-deprivation.aspx>

American Psychological Association: Sleep deprivation may be undermining teen health

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct01/sleepteen.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: School Start Times for Middle School and High School Students — United States, 2011–12 School Year

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6430a1.htm>

Frontline: Adolescents & Sleep

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/from/sleep.html>

Kids Health

www.kidshealth.org/parent/growth/sleep/sleep_problems.html#cat167

National Sleep Foundation

<https://sleepfoundation.org/>

Nationwide Children's Hospital

<http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/sleep-in-adolescents>

PBS – This Emotional Life

Teens Sleeping with Cell Phones: A Clear and Present Danger

<http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/teens-sleeping-cell-phones-clear-and-present-danger>

The Mayo Clinic: Teen Sleep – Why is your Teen so Tired?

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/teen-and-teen-health/in-depth/teens-health/art-20046157>

UCLA Sleep Disorders Center

<http://sleepcenter.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=63>

Portions of this tip sheet were adapted from some of the resources listed above.

- Difficulty waking up in the morning
- Inability to concentrate
- Falling asleep or “drifting off” during class
- Shortened attention span
- Memory impairment
- Poor decision making
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Moodiness or depression
- Aggression
- Risk-taking behavior
- Slower physical reflexes, clumsiness
- Reduced athletic performance
- Reduced academic performance
- Increased number of ‘sick days’ from school because of tiredness



Talking Tips:

How to Promote Good Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene refers to practices and habits that are necessary for a quality nighttime sleep and full daytime alertness. Because teenage sleep patterns are so unique, it is especially important for parents to encourage these behaviors in their teens.

- **Establish a regular bedtime.** Going to bed at the same time each night signals to your body that it's time to sleep. On weekends, try not to go to sleep more than 1 hour later or wake up more than 2 - 3 hours later than during the week.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity can decrease stress and promote relaxation. Finish exercising at least 3 hours before bedtime.
- **Avoid stimulants.** No beverages with caffeine, such as soda, coffee, or energy drinks, after 4 p.m.
- **Relax the mind.** Avoid violent, scary, or action movies or television shows right before bed.
- **Keep the lights low.** Darkness triggers the production of melatonin, a natural hormone that tells the body it is time for rest. Avoid bright lights, TV, computer screens, and other electronics at least 1 hour before bed.
- **Limit naps.** A short nap can give teens renewed energy when they need it most. Keep naps under 30 minutes and not too close to bedtime.
- **Create the right sleeping environment.** Studies show that people sleep best in a dark room that is slightly on the cool side.
- **Wake up with bright light.** Light signals the brain that it's time to wake up.

Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.

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