



Adolescents and Sleep

Adolescents need as much sleep as they did when they were preteens, 8.5-9.25 hours. Fewer than 15% of teens report getting 8.5 hours per night and more than 25% report they get less than 6.5 hours per night (National Sleep Foundation, 2000).

What Happens When You Don't Get Enough Sleep?

- Sleepiness and/or falling asleep during classroom instruction that is more passive or monotonous
- Difficulties concentrating
- Problems initiating and persisting at completing school work or tasks that are tedious
- Organizing complex tasks (projects)
- Irritability
- Low frustration tolerance
- Creates or worsens anxiety and depression symptoms
- Contributes to impulsive or risk-taking behaviors
- Tardiness to class or school
- General behavior problems
- Falling asleep behind the wheel of a moving vehicle

Sleep Changes in Adolescence:

The biological clock shifts so the teen naturally wants to fall asleep later. Teens often feel more alert in the evening, making it more difficult for them to fall asleep. Unfortunately, typical school schedules are “out of sync” with this natural process.

Tips for Promoting Sleep:

- ✓ At a minimum, stop drinking soft drinks, energy drinks, and coffee or espresso beverages after 3PM. Some people are particularly sensitive to caffeine and should consider eliminating caffeine or replacing it with a non-caffeinated beverage.
- ✓ Get some exercise during the day.
- ✓ Get sunlight during the day.
- ✓ One hour before bedtime, turn off the TV and computer. The light from the screen interferes with the signals the brain needs to promote feeling sleepy.
- ✓ Make sure the bedroom temperature is a little cooler, but not cold.
- ✓ Opt for a form of “white noise”, such as a fan or sleep machine, to block out environmental noises that can be distracting to falling asleep.
- ✓ On the weekends, sleep-in no more than 2 hours past the normal time he/she would get up during the week. Sleeping in confuses the body and resets it, making getting up for school Monday morning more difficult. If you've ever changed time zones and felt a little “off”, sleeping-in produces a similar effect.

There's No Way My Teen Will Agree to Make These Changes!

Make changes slowly. Explain the physical changes that are happening to your teen. Discuss the “tips for promoting sleep” and negotiate one area where a small change seems realistic given your situation. Pick one area to start with that both of you think will be relatively easy and is likely to be successful. It's better to experience small successes first rather than a change that feels overwhelming.

Does my Teen Have a Sleep Disorder?

- Some sleep disturbances can be fairly common, are mild, and generally easy to treat.
- Most common sleep disorder is called *delayed sleep-phase syndrome* where the teen will fall asleep between 2 and 4AM.
- Other disorders include night terrors, sleepwalking, nighttime bedwetting, sleep-onset anxiety, obstructive sleep apnea, and narcolepsy.
- If you are concerned that your teen has one of these conditions, you should consult your primary care provider.