

Is Your Teenager Getting Enough Sleep

Your teenager probably doesn't understand the importance of getting a good night's sleep. As school starts this is even more important. Teens have so much going on in their lives with homework, extracurricular activities, jobs, and a slew of technology that tempts kids to stay up late. Few teens are getting the nine hours of sleep per night that researchers say they need. When parents suggest that their teens go to bed I am sure that very few march upstairs in complete agreement. The end of the day for many teens is the beginning to their social existence. They spend time in their rooms chatting online, catching up with friends through cell phones or cramming for a test while the rest of the house is asleep.

While not getting enough sleep may not seem like a big deal -- after all, few adults get the recommended seven hours per night, and we survive -- doctors say getting enough sleep is crucial for teenagers. Lack of sleep can affect school performance, moods, and behavior. Sleepy teens have more car accidents, are more likely to be obese, and are more likely to be depressed or anxious than kids who get enough sleep. Plus, sleep is physically restorative, so a lack of sleep may impact a teens growth, hormones and metabolism.

Unfortunately, while the problem is simple, the solution isn't. As exasperated parents may have noticed, teens are biologically predisposed to staying up late and sleeping in, so schools that start early work against them. They're so busy all day with television, the Internet, cell phones and text-messaging it makes it hard to wind down at night. The first step to developing good sleep habits in teens is to take a closer look at their everyday schedules. Are they working too many hours at their after-school job that they end up staying up late to finish other projects and homework? Does football practice take up so much time that they never get to bed before 11 p.m.? A family should look at ways to make their schedules more manageable.

Other important sleep management tips for teens include the following ideas:

During your day increase your physical activity, try not to nap for more than a half hour late in the day, avoid caffeine after 4 p.m., find time to relax after a busy day, and make healthy eating choices throughout the day. When going to bed try to hit the pillow the same time each night and get up the same time each morning, even if it is a weekend. Turn off your cell phones, Instant Messenger, television, and other technology distractions before you go to bed. Avoid late night cram sessions and prepare for your day and your entire week in advance. If you have trouble falling asleep, keep a pad of paper by your bedside to write down all of the things that are running through your mind. When you wake up in the morning, really wake up, open the windows and let the sun shine in or turn on the lights in your room.

If you are getting enough rest at night and you are still falling asleep during the day, it's a good idea to visit your doctor. He or she will look at your overall health and sleep habits and may do a test to find out whether anything is happening during the night to disturb your sleep, like sleep apnea. For more information on this or other Youth Development related topics please contact the University of Missouri Extension Office at 660-885-5556.