

Teens and Sleep: Are they Getting Enough Of It?

Research shows that teenagers need, on average, 9.5 hours of sleep a night. But studies show that teens get an average of 7.4 hours of sleep a night. Sleep deprivation can lead to difficulty waking in the morning, oversleeping on weekends, poor concentration, irritability, extreme moodiness, depression, lowered academic performance and drowsy driving.

Here are some Pointers for Parents:

1. Educate yourself about adolescent development, including physical and behavioral changes you can expect, including those that relate to their sleep needs and patterns.
2. Look for signs of sleep deprivation (insufficient sleep) and sleepiness in your child -- keep in mind that they are not always obvious. Signs include difficulty waking in the morning, irritability late in the day, falling asleep spontaneously during quiet times of the day, and sleeping for extra long periods on the weekends. Above all, don't allow any family member to drive when sleep deprived or drowsy.
3. Enforce regular sleep schedules for all children and maintain appropriate schedules as they grow older. To help induce sleepiness in adolescents, establish a quiet time in the evening when the lights are dimmed and loud music is not permitted.
4. Talk with your children about their individual sleep/wake schedules and level of sleepiness. Assess the time spent in extracurricular and employment activities with regard to their sleep patterns and needs, and make adjustments if necessary.
5. Encourage your children to complete a sleep diary for 7 to 14 consecutive (and typical) days. The diary can provide immediate information on poor sleep hygiene, and it can be used to measure the effectiveness of efforts to change. Be sure to share the sleep logs or diaries with any sleep experts or other health professional who later assesses your child's sleep or sleepiness. (Why not keep your own sleep diary as well?)
6. If your child's sleep schedule during vacation is not in sync with the upcoming school schedule, help him or her adjust it for a smooth transition. This process can take from several days to several weeks, so plan ahead!
7. If conservative measures to shift your child's circadian rhythm are ineffective, or if your child practices good sleep hygiene and still has difficulty staying awake at times throughout the day:
 - o Consult a sleep expert. Excessive daytime sleepiness can be a sign of narcolepsy, apnea, periodic limb movement disorder and other serious but treatable sleep disorders.
 - o Discuss with teachers and school officials ways to accommodate your child's needs, if necessary. Excessive daytime sleepiness due to sleep disorders or other medical conditions are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Disabilities Education Act of 1997.

8. Be a good role model: Make sleep a high priority for yourself and your family and practice good sleep hygiene. Listen to your body. If you are often sleepy, get more sleep at night, take naps, or sleep longer when possible. Consult a sleep expert if needed.
9. Actively seek positive changes in your community by increasing public awareness about sleep and the harmful effects of sleep deprivation, and by supporting sleep-smart policies.

From the National Sleep Foundation www.sleepfoundation.org