



Kings Langley School

Unlocking Potential for Life

Teenagers and the Importance of Sleep

A Self Help Guide for
Students and Parents



The Teenage Years

The teenage years can often be a very tense and difficult period for both adult and child and this is a time when parents can feel at their most helpless. Research shows that the earlier parents and carers talk to and engage with their teenagers, the more likely young people are going to be able to make sensible decisions and choices for themselves.

The Teen Brain

Until recently it was assumed that there was little further development in the brain after the end of childhood. However we now know that the brain continues to change and develop all through adolescence. In fact, there is more change in the brain during adolescence than at any other time in human development apart from the first three years of life. This means that the teenage years are a critical period. What happens during this period has major implications for later development. Of course the brain does not develop in isolation. The brain and the environment interact, each influencing the other.

Teenagers and Sleep

The teenage years are a formative period. The brain and body experience significant development, and the transition to adulthood brings important changes that affect emotions, personality, social and family life, and academics.

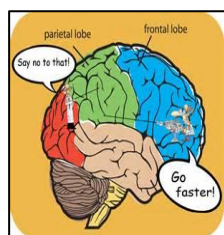
Sleep is essential during this time, however unfortunately, research indicates that many teens get far less sleep than they need. Academics suggest that teens need between 8 and 10 hours sleep per night. Getting this recommended amount of sleep can help teens maintain their physical health, emotional well-being, and school performance. At the same time, teens face numerous challenges to getting consistent, restorative sleep. Recognising those challenges helps teens and their parents make a plan so that teens get the sleep they need.

Why Is Sleep Important For Teens?

Sleep is vital for people of any age. For teens, though, profound mental, physical, social, and emotional development requires quality sleep. Sleep benefits the brain and promotes attention, memory, and analytical thought. Whether it's studying for a test, learning an instrument, or acquiring job skills, sleep is essential for teens. Research has also shown that sleep is especially important for teenagers as it is a time of memory consolidation. The hours of sleep allow the brain a period when the learning that has taken place during the day can be rehearsed and embedded in long term memory. It also allows the brain time to 'repair' and 'rest'.

Emotional Health

Most people have experienced how sleep can affect mood, causing irritability and exaggerated emotional reactions. Over time, the consequences can be even greater for teens who are adapting to more independence, responsibility, and new social relationships. Prolonged sleep loss may negatively affect emotional development,





increasing risks for interpersonal conflict as well as more serious mental health problems. Mental health disorders including anxiety and depression have routinely been linked to poor sleep and sleep deprivation. Improving sleep in adolescents may play a role in preventing mental health disorders or reducing their symptoms.

Sleep deprivation can affect the development of the frontal lobe, a part of the brain that is critical to control impulsive behaviour and studies have found that teens who don't get enough sleep are more likely to engage in more high-risk behaviours.

Physical Health and Development

Sleep contributes to the effective function of virtually every system of the body. It empowers the immune system, helps regulate hormones, and enables muscle and tissue recovery. Substantial physical development happens during adolescence and can be negatively affected by a lack of sleep. For example, researchers have found that adolescents who fail to get enough sleep may have their metabolism affected that may put them at higher risk of such things as diabetes and long-term cardiovascular problems.



Why Is It Hard for Teens To Get Good Sleep?

There is no single reason for sleep insufficiency among teens. Several factors contribute to this problem, and these factors may vary from teenager to teenager. During adolescence, there is a strong tendency toward being a "night owl," staying up later at night and sleeping longer into the morning. First, teens have a sleep drive that builds more slowly, which means they don't start to feel tired until later in the evening. Second, the body waits longer to start producing melatonin, which is the hormone that helps promote sleep.

If allowed to sleep on their own schedule, many teens would get eight hours or more per night, sleeping from 11 p.m. or midnight until 8 or 9 am, but school start times in force teens to wake up much earlier in the morning. Because of the biological delay in their sleep-wake cycle, many teens simply aren't able to fall asleep early enough to get eight or more hours of sleep and still arrive at school on time.

With reduced sleep on weekdays, teens may try to catch up by sleeping in on the weekend, but this may exacerbate their delayed sleep schedule and inconsistent nightly rest. Experts have reported, however, that this sleep catch up can be important to helping the **brain to have the opportunity for 'repair' and 'rest'**

Use of Electronic Devices

Electronic devices including mobile phones and tablets are ubiquitous among teens and most teens keep at least one device in their bedroom at night. Screen time late into the evening can contribute to sleeping problems. Using these devices can keep teens' brains wired, and incoming notifications can cause disrupted and fragmented sleep. Evidence also points to the fact that exposure to the light from all devices contributes to suppressed melatonin production and this added to the fact that melatonin is produced later in teens exacerbates the sleep issue.



Top Ten Tips for Good Sleep

1. **Emphasise the importance of sleep** and that it improves memory and performance.
Teens need at least eight hours' sleep on school nights.
2. **Encourage regular exercise** – 20 minutes three times a week will help.
3. **Suggest they drink less caffeine** (in cola and energy drinks as well as tea and coffee).
Too much caffeine stops them falling asleep and prevents deep sleep.
4. **Point out that eating too much or too little close to bedtime** – an over full or empty stomach – may prevent sleep onset, or cause discomfort throughout the night.
5. **Try and get your teen into a good bed routine** – suggest that doing the same things in the same order before going to sleep can help.
6. **Avoid using electronic devices** (TVs, gaming machines and more importantly, tablets and smartphones) in the hour before bedtime. Blue light emitting from these gadgets stimulates the brain and may inhibit melatonin production – the hormone you need to sleep.
7. **Eliminate electronic devices from the bedroom.** If this isn't possible, try to zone areas of the room for work, leisure and sleep.
8. **Ensure a good sleep environment** – a room that is dark, cool, quiet, safe and comfortable.
9. **Make sure your teenager has a comfortable bed.** It may be time to get a new one – and encourage him or her to choose it themselves.
10. **Don't give teenagers hand-me-down beds.** A good rule of thumb: if the bed's no longer good for its first user it's not good enough for them either.
Remember, habits learned in adolescence often become lifetime habits – so make sure good sleep habits are learned early.

The Benefits of Good Quality Sleep

- **Increased energy**
- **Sharper concentration**
- **Better decision Making**
- **Improved memory**
- **Better ability to manage stress**
- **Improved physical health**
- **Better immune system**