

Sleep Deprivation in Teens: A Common Problem



Teens on average need about 8 to 10 hours of sleep at night. But most don't get the amount of sleep they need. School, friends, homework, activities, the internet, and TV may all have a higher priority for a teen than sleep. But not getting enough sleep (sleep deprivation) can lead to serious problems for a teen's health and well-being. Here's how to better understand your child's sleep needs and what you can do to help.

A teen's natural sleep rhythms

Teens tend to stay up late and want to sleep late in the morning. But it's not that they are being lazy or stubborn. It's actually due to natural rhythms of the teen's body. Body chemicals in teens work to make the teen naturally want to go to bed around midnight or later. These chemicals also make teens want to wake up in the late morning. Early school start times work against these natural body rhythms. And pressures on a teen's time after school stop them from going to bed early to make up for lost sleep. The result is often a sleep-deprived teen.

Why should I be concerned?

Teens who don't get enough sleep may have trouble focusing in class. They may have lower grades than they are capable of. A long-term (chronic) lack of sleep in teens has also been linked to health problems. These include an increased risk of being overweight, developing diabetes or heart disease, and getting infections. Teens who are sleep deprived may fall asleep in class or other inappropriate places. And for teens who are driving, being sleepy can raise the risk of a serious accident.

Signs that your teen needs more sleep

Is your teen sleep deprived? Watch for the following signs:

- Daytime sleepiness
- Trouble concentrating or remembering
- Irritability
- Need for caffeine or other stimulants to stay awake
- Need for naps after school
- Poor grades
- Trouble sleeping. This includes problems falling asleep or staying asleep.

What you can do

Tips to help your child get more sleep and be more alert during the day:

- Encourage your teen to get a full night's sleep on a regular basis. Try to set a regular bedtime. Help your teen avoid staying up late to do homework or study. If after-school activities are too time-consuming, think about cutting back.
- Have your teen get up at the same time every morning. Discourage sleeping in on weekends to catch up on sleep. This does more harm than good by throwing sleep rhythms off.
- Limit caffeine intake. Don't let your child have caffeine after lunchtime.

- Have your teen use their bed only for sleeping. That means **not** using the bed for: reading, writing, eating, going online, watching TV, talking on the phone, or playing videos or other games.
- Restrict smartphone, TV, and computer use (which can be stimulating) for at least an hour before bedtime. Instead, encourage reading, listening to quiet music, writing in a journal, or other calming activity during this time.
- Give your teen a warm, noncaffeinated drink such as milk before bed.
- Make the bedroom a place where it is easy to fall asleep. Take the TV, computer, and phone out of the bedroom. Make sure the room is cool and as dark and quiet as possible.
- Turn a bright light on in the child's room in the morning. The bright light helps the body wake up and shuts down production of sleep hormones. Have your child use an alarm clock with a light feature.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

The following can be signs of a more serious problem that can be treated. Let your child's healthcare provider know if your child:

- Falls asleep during the day
- Has leg twitching or moving when trying to fall asleep, or extremely restless sleep
- Sleepwalks
- Snores loudly
- Has trouble falling asleep or staying asleep often (insomnia)

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.