



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #27

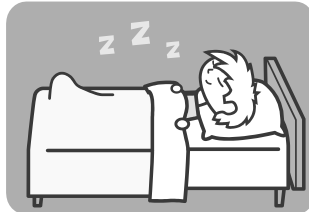
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Is Your Child Getting Enough Sleep?

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) have identified adolescents and young adults (ages 12 to 25) as a population at high risk for problem sleepiness. Steps must be taken to reduce the risks linked to exhaustion and too little sleep. The most alarming results of sleepiness are injuries and deaths related to gaps in attention and slow response times at critical moments, such as while driving. Young drivers age 25 or under are involved in more than one-half of fall-asleep car crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Sleep is a vital part of adolescents' and teens' performance, health, and overall quality of life, and should be a family priority. (Source: National Sleep Foundation)

Why is sleep so important? (especially for adolescents and teens)

- Sleep is a basic human need.
- Sleep is something our bodies need to do—it is not an option.
- Sleep is food for the brain.
- Sleep lets parts of the brain actually increase their activity.
- Sleep lets the body produce more of certain vital hormones.
- Sleep allows a person's body to grow and mend itself.
- Sleep is vital to a person's well being.



How is lack of adequate sleep harmful?

- Lack of adequate sleep can get in the way of a person's ability to think, work, socialize, and enjoy life.
- Lack of adequate sleep can cause difficulty concentrating and making decisions.
- Lack of adequate sleep means not enough energy to do school work well or to actively participate in sports.
- Lack of adequate sleep can cause adolescents/teens to get lower grades in school.
- Lack of adequate sleep can cause adolescents/teens to feel unhappy, sad, or depressed.

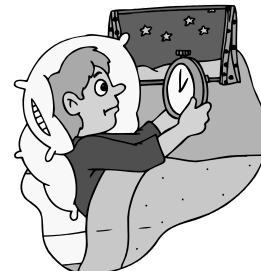
Parents should know that all children—including teenagers—need more sleep than adults need. According to studies done by the Mayo Clinic, “adolescents need about nine hours of sleep a night in order to maintain the best possible daytime attention. However, only about 15 percent actually get that amount of sleep regularly. In a recent survey, more than a quarter of the teens who were interviewed said they usually sleep six hours, or even less, on school nights.” For many adolescents, part-time jobs, homework, school activities, and time with friends often become more important than sleep. But lack of sleep can have serious outcomes:

- Irritability and moodiness
- Depression
- Increased anger and lower tolerance for frustration
- Inability to concentrate and learn
- Sleeping through classes
- Lowered grades
- Deadly auto accidents
- Overeating and weight gain
- Decreased logical thinking and emotional control

A shortage of sleep is common in adolescents/teens. There is growing evidence that a lack of adequate sleep clearly has a negative impact on learning, emotions, and behavior. This sleep loss can be due to physiological changes, undiagnosed sleep disorders, poor sleep habits, or other demands. Adolescents require 9 hours of sleep on average, yet almost 50 percent get less than 8 hours. For adolescents/teens who do not get enough sleep, daytime sleepiness increases and performance decreases. (Source: "Adolescents and Sleep: A Guide to the Sleep-Deprived World of Teenagers", 2005)

Normal physiological change:

There is a common and normal change in adolescents' sleep/wake cycle that may delay their sleep onset time by as much as 2 hours. Adolescents with a delayed sleep phase typically stay up late at night and are difficult to awaken in the morning.



Sleep disorders:

Sleep disorders in adolescents are often unrecognized and can result in long-term problems with success and quality of life. These disorders usually require medical attention.

Sleep apnea is a condition caused by irregular collapsing of the upper airway during sleep, and is often associated with snoring and irregular sleep.

Children and teens with sleep apnea

- are sleepy during the day,
- tend to have lower grades,
- tend to do poorer on homework and projects,
- tend to score lower on tests, and
- may also seem irritable and/or depressed.

Other sleep disorders may include Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS), narcolepsy (sudden sleep attacks), insomnia (inability to sleep), and depression.

Poor sleep habits can include:

- not enough hours of sleep;
- irregular going to bed and getting up times;
- bright lights or exercising just before bed;
- putting off bedtime to watch TV, play computer games, or talk on the phone;
- drinking caffeinated beverages within 4–6 hours of going to bed.

Tips for parents to help their adolescents/teens get enough sleep

- Maintain a regular go-to-bed time and get-up time (weekdays and weekends).
- Create a good sleep environment (cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable).
- Limit caffeine, exercise, mental stimulation, bright lights the last couple of hours before going to bed.
- Turn off the TV, computer, and cell phones.
- Be a good role model and get the recommended amount of sleep each night.
- Remember that adolescents/teens generally need more sleep than adults need.
- Maintain age-appropriate sleep schedules for all your children.
- Talk to your children about the importance of sleep and make sleep a priority for the whole family.
- Ask teachers if your child is sleepy or sleeping in class.
- Advocate for positive changes in your schools by increasing public awareness about sleep and related disorders.
- Support sleep-smart policies and request that sleep information be included in health classes.
- Encourage your school district to support policies that will benefit the sleep health of all students, such as later school start times for adolescents/teens.