

Sleep in Adolescents (13-18 Years)

What to expect

Adolescents are notorious for not getting enough sleep. The average amount of sleep that teenagers get is between 7 and 7 ¼ hours. However, they need between 9 and 9 ½ hours (studies show that most teenagers need exactly 9 ¼ hours of sleep). Teenagers do not get enough sleep for a number of reasons:

- **Shift in sleep schedule.** After puberty, there is a biological shift in an adolescent's internal clock of about 2 hours, meaning that a teenager who used to fall asleep at 9:00 PM will now not be able to fall asleep until 11:00PM. It also means waking 2 hours later in the morning.
- **Early high school start times.** In most school districts, the move to high school is accompanied by an earlier school start time. Some high schools start as early as 7:00 AM, meaning that some teenagers have to get up as early as 5:00 AM to get ready for and travel to school.
- **Social and school obligations.** Homework, sports, after-school activities (often occurring during the evening), and socializing lead to late bedtimes.

As a result, most adolescents are very sleep deprived. Sleep deprivation will impact on many aspects of your teenager's functioning:

- **Mood.** Sleep deprivation will cause your teenager to be moody, irritable, and cranky. In addition, she will have a difficult time regulating her mood, such as by getting frustrated or upset more easily.
- **Behavior.** Teenagers who are sleep deprived are also more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as drinking, driving fast, and engaging in other dangerous activities.
- **Cognitive ability.** Inadequate sleep will result in problems with attention, memory, decision making, reaction time, and creativity, all of which are important in school.
- **Academic performance.** Studies show that teenagers who get less sleep are more apt to get poor grades in school, fall asleep in school, and have school tardiness/absences.
- **Drowsy driving.** Teenagers are at the highest risk for falling asleep at the wheel. Drowsy driving is the most likely to occur in the middle of the night (2:00 to 4:00 AM), but also in mid-afternoon (3:00 to 4:00 PM).

How to help your teenager get enough sleep

- **Maintain a regular sleep schedule.** Your teenager should go to bed and wake up at about the same time each day. Her sleep schedule should also ensure adequate time in bed.
- **Avoid oversleeping on weekends.** Although catching up on some sleep on the weekends can be helpful, sleeping in until noon on Sunday will make it hard for your teenager to get back on a school schedule that night.
- **Take early afternoon naps.** A nap of 15-20 minutes in the early afternoon can be beneficial.
- **Turn off televisions, computers, and radios.** Television viewing, computer-game playing, internet use, and other stimulating activities at bedtime will cause problems falling asleep.
- **Avoid caffeine, smoking, alcohol, and drugs.** All of these cause sleep problems.
- **Contact your teenager's doctor.** Speak to your adolescent's physician if she has difficulties falling asleep, snores, or seems excessively sleepy during the day.

Adapted from: Mindell JA & Owens JA (2003). *A Clinical Guide to Pediatric Sleep: Diagnosis and Management of Sleep Problems*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.