



Getting enough sleep is difficult for most teenagers. However, for teenagers with depressive symptoms, research shows that sleep problems are more common. The relationship between sleep and depression is complex. For some teens, depressive symptoms may occur before sleep problems start. For others, sleep problems may lead to depression. Even though the problem is well recognized, few teenagers get help for it. As a parent, there are some things you can do to help your teen get a good night's sleep. *Adapted from MayoClinic.com, NHS, the Canadian Sleep Society and the Canadian Paediatric Society*

Understanding a teenager's internal clock

Everyone has a 24 hour internal clock cycle that regulates sleep-wake cycles, called circadian rhythms. In childhood, the normal circadian rhythm directs most children to fall asleep around 8 or 9pm. In puberty hormonal changes cause the internal clock to delay the time teens start to feel sleepy. Your teen may tell you that he or she is not tired or is unable to fall asleep until 12am. Unfortunately, on weekdays when the alarm goes off at 7am; your teen is tired and does not want to get up. Then on the weekend, your teen's sleep-wake cycle tells him or her that it is okay to stay up even later which delays waking up until 10am or 11am on Saturday and Sunday. When your teen tries to catch up for lost sleep by sleeping in on the weekends; this only results in later bedtimes on the next night. This makes getting back into a school schedule and up at 7am on Monday even harder.

To complicate matters further...

Teenagers are concerned with many social pressures (e.g., school, friendships, athletics, part-time work, body image, texting, tweeting, phone calls, YouTube, television etc...). The need to have a full life and the desire to be socially connected interferes with sleep. Unfortunately, teenagers feel they are able to live with very little sleep. While sleep deprivation can be tolerated for a few days, teenagers do not recognize how important sleep is to their overall health and functioning. Most teenagers don't believe that sleep can affect so many areas of their lives, especially their mood and academic performance.

Signs that your teen is getting too little sleep

- Daytime sleepiness, napping and fatigue
- Irritability and mood changes
- Trouble waking up and being on time in the morning
- Poor concentration
- Poor memory and academic performance
- Decreased motivation
- Performance impairment for critical tasks such as driving or being accident prone
- Cravings for stimulant drinks like coffee, redbull and coke
- Decreased ability to make effective decisions

How you can help your teen sleep well

- Modeling good sleep habits supports better sleep habits for your teen.
- Ensure your teen's room is dark, the bed and pillow are comfortable and it is a cool but comfortable temperature.
- Lower the volume of music or TV at bedtime.
- Dim your house lights an hour before bedtime to encourage sleepiness.
- Model relaxation or quiet time before bed.
- Discourage use of computers, television, and cell phones at bedtime. The artificial light shining into your eyes from backlit screens on these devices, can stop the production of melatonin, a hormone that your body makes to get you ready to sleep.
- Encourage your teen to only use his or her bed for sleeping and only fall asleep in his or her bed (not the couch or favourite chair).
- Encourage your teen not to smoke, drink caffeine, use alcohol or drugs because they stimulate the brain and make falling asleep difficult.
- Encourage exercise every day but avoid strenuous exercise 3 hours before bedtime.
- Discourage napping. If needed, a nap should be 30 minutes or less. No after supper naps!
- Encourage your teen to write down worries and a "To Do List" to prevent over-thinking at night.
- In a respectful way, help your teen understand how a lack of sleep is affecting his or her life, relationships and health.
- Is your teen overscheduled? Some research shows part-time work over 15 hours per week may decrease academic performance. Encourage and make it possible for your teen to have time to relax, have fun, and do something he or she likes.
- Provide support by listening, showing interest in problems and respecting his or her feelings. (e.g., set aside time, perhaps at supper, to talk to your teen. Talking shouldn't be problem specific; it can be as simple as sharing one positive thing that happened during the day.

Sleep Scheduling

The most common reason for lack of sleep in teenagers and young people is a condition called Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome or DSPS. If your teen is staying up beyond midnight on a regular basis, he or she may have DSPS. It means his or her sleep-wake (circadian rhythm) pattern is delayed. The hormones your teen's body releases to provide energy are working a lot later at night than they should be. This makes your teen stay awake and sets his or her mind racing. Once the late sleeping pattern is established, it is difficult but not impossible for your teen's brain to readjust. Your teenager will need to re-learn the normal sleeping time. Your teen can do this by Sleep Scheduling. It is simple and effective.

The steps are:

- Encourage your teen get out of bed within half an hour of the same time every day, including weekends, no matter how little or poorly he or she has slept.
- Have your teen calculate the average of how much he or she sleeps per night Sunday to Thursday. To set a new bedtime, add one hour to the average sleep time.
- As your teen's body becomes accustomed to the new waking time, he or she may start feeling tired earlier in the evening. Once this happens your teen can increase his or her sleep time by an additional 30 - 60 minutes.
- Your teen can repeat the above steps as many times as necessary until his or her body adjusts it's sleep schedule.
- Once your teen gets the required amount of sleep you will start seeing the difference! Tell your teen about any positive changes you notice (e.g., you are so much fun lately, it's great!)

If you need more information call:
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Resource has been adapted by Alberta Health Services from Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust, UK.
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Revised: 2013-02-19

Sleep Advice for Parents of Teens

