

Teens and sleep: Why you need it and how to get enough

- Tired of always feeling sleepy?
- Having trouble staying awake in class?
- Find it hard to get out of bed for school in the morning?
- Have an overwhelming need for a nap as soon as you get home from school?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are not alone. Many teenagers feel that they are always tired.

Why do teens need more sleep?

Sleep helps to fuel your brain and your body. Teens need more sleep because their bodies and minds are growing quickly.

Scientific research shows that many teens do not get enough sleep. To be at your best, **you need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep every day**. While you might not always be able to get this much, it's important to try and get as much as you can.

Why is it important to get enough sleep?

Although getting enough sleep may not seem that big a deal, teens who don't get enough sleep and are overtired are more likely to:

- struggle in school,
- have trouble with memory, concentration and motivation (the desire to accomplish a goal),
- be involved in car crashes and other accidents. Sleepiness (the feeling of wanting or needing to sleep in places and at times when you shouldn't) affects reaction times, or

- feel depressed, which can become a serious medical condition.

What causes my sleepiness?

Often the reason is obvious, such as too many late nights in a row. Although there are some medical causes of sleepiness, most sleepy teens just aren't getting enough sleep.

How do I know if I'm getting enough sleep?

Signs that you need more sleep can include:

- difficulty waking up in the morning,
- trouble concentrating throughout the day,
- falling asleep during classes, and
- feeling moody or even depressed.

Why is it so hard to get enough sleep?

There are many reasons. Some you may be able to control and some you may not.

You probably have a very busy life, but you still need “downtime” to relax, unwind and spend time with friends. This usually happens at the expense of sleeping. Many teens also crave the quiet privacy of a late night after parents have gone to bed.

When you think about all the other things you need to do (homework, socializing, sports, chores, part-time jobs, etc.), getting to bed early enough to get 8 to 10 hours of sleep can seem pretty hard.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Have a relaxing bedtime routine.** Have a light snack (such as a glass of milk) before bed. Try to go to bed at about the same time every night. Keep your room cool, dark and quiet but open the curtains or turn on the lights as soon as you get up in the morning.
- **Always fall asleep in your bed.** Use your bed for sleeping only. Avoid doing homework, using a smartphone or tablet, or playing video games while in bed. Try to be in your bed with the lights out for at least 8 hours every night.

- **Napping during the day can make it difficult to fall asleep.** If you want to nap, keep it short (less than 30 minutes). Definitely don't nap after dinner.
- **Get exercise every day**, but avoid very hard exercise in the evening.
- **Avoid caffeine** (coffee, tea, pop, energy drinks), especially after mid-afternoon. Don't use any products to help you sleep such as alcohol, herbal products or over-the-counter sleep aids.
- **Limit screen time before bed.** Using electronic media and being exposed to the screen's light before trying to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.
- On weekends, no matter how late you go to bed, try to **get up within 2 hours to 4 hours of your usual wake time.** This is especially important if you have trouble falling asleep on Sunday nights.
- **Make sure you are not trying to do too much.** Do you still have some time for fun and to get enough sleep? If you are having trouble sleeping because you have too much on your mind, try keeping a diary or to-do lists. If you write things down before sleep, you may feel less worried or stressed.

See your doctor if you:

- have trouble falling asleep at night despite trying the tips in this document.
- wake up through the night or early in the morning and cannot get back to sleep.
- continue to feel like you have no energy despite getting enough sleep.
- are having trouble meeting your responsibilities – such as not being able to go to school, get to work on time, or spend time with your friends.
- have feelings of sadness that don't seem to go away.
- have worried feelings that make it hard to focus on other things.
- often feel sick in other ways (such as headaches, loss of appetite or other symptoms you can't explain).

Additional resources

- The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (2018)

Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Adolescent Health Committee
- Community Paediatrics Committee
- Public Education Advisory Committee

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