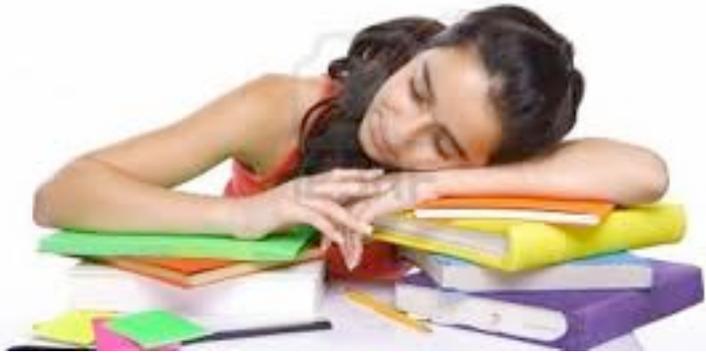


TEENS AND SLEEP



Red Ladder Optimized
Learning Staff

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Scientists at Oxford University have found that children and teens watching TV, playing video games, and text messaging late into the night can lose the equivalent of a month's worth of sleep over a year. Although teens need nearly as much sleep as younger children do, they rarely get it. For teens, there are usually too many things to do for there to be enough time to sleep.

Teens face heavy loads of schoolwork, new social situations, and possibly the challenge of a going off to work for the first time but it's tough to do all of this feeling tired. Like younger children, teenagers who don't get at least eight or nine hours of sleep are less alert, can't concentrate as well and are at increased risk for problems with their metabolism and immune system, fatigue, and depression. As Dr. Mary Carskadon of Brown Medical School has put it, teens who think they can "get by" on less sleep "are often not really getting by at all."



RED LADDER OPTIMIZED LEARNING
633 - 1445 PORTAGE AVENUE
WINNIPEG MANITOBA R3G 3P4
P - 204.489.1682
F - 204.489.1748
E - info@redladder.ca

Otherwise healthy teenagers can experience the same dyssomnias, parasomnias, and sleep problems due to medical conditions that younger children do, but other issues come into play as well. TV watching interferes with the production of the hormone melatonin, which regulates sleep and appears to have a role in regulating the onset and course of puberty. That is, sleep loss associated with too much television watching may be related to the premature onset of puberty. Many teens who use drugs or alcohol develop sleep disturbances. Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS) is the most common of the circadian rhythm sleep disorders and affects about seven percent of adolescents. Although teens with this difficulty may sleep well, day and night are turned around. It seems that no matter what they do, they can't fall asleep at night

and can't get up in the morning for work or school. It has been suggested that one sign that a person has passed from adolescence into adulthood is that sleep phases return to normal.

Improving Teens' Quality of Sleep

- Parents of teenagers should watch for signs that their child isn't getting enough sleep. Watch for difficulties waking in the morning and irritability late in the day, falling suddenly asleep during quiet times of the day and sleeping for extra long periods on weekends. Sleepiness can look similar to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children and teens.
- Maintain appropriate sleep schedules as children grow older. Establish quiet times during the evening when lights aren't bright and music isn't too loud.
- Don't have a TV, video game unit, or computer in a teen's bedroom. Limit media consumption, especially in the evening.
- Talk with your teen about their sleep and their daytime sleepiness. Talk about how much time goes to extracurricular activities and jobs, and make adjustments if sleep is being sacrificed.
- Encourage your child to keep a sleep diary for 14 consecutive, typical days. The diary should give information about sleep hygiene and about the effectiveness of efforts you both make to change sleep patterns for the better.
- Don't allow your teen to operate a vehicle when sleep deprived or drowsy.
- When sleep schedules get out of balance during winter or summer holidays, help your child to readjust several days to a couple of weeks ahead of returning to school.
- If your teenager practices good sleep hygiene but is still very sleepy during the day, speak with his or her doctor to rule out the possibility of a sleep disorder.
- Excessive daytime sleepiness due to a sleep disorder is grounds for accommodations. Consider requesting accommodations to your teen's school program from teachers and school officials.
- Request sleep education programs in your child's school.

Be a healthy role model for your teenager: Make attention to sleep a part of your day-to-day self care. If you are often tired during the day, do what you need to do to get more sleep. Consult a sleep expert if you need to. ☐

