New Information About Adolescent Sleep

Sleep affects how you think, how you feel, and how healthy you are. Adolescents need as much sleep each night as they did when they were children, but many adolescents do not get enough sleep. An ideal amount of sleep for an adolescent is about 9 hours each night.

**BIOLOGIC CHANGES LEADING TO SLEEP CHANGES**
About the time that puberty starts, adolescents develop a 2-hour sleep-wake “phase delay.” This means that if your child usually went to bed at 8 PM and woke up at 6 AM, then during adolescence he or she may feel more awake in the evening so that he or she does not feel like he or she has to go to bed until around 10 PM. Since most adolescents still have to get up early each morning for school, this delay in bedtime may lead to your adolescent getting less sleep each night than he or she did as a child.

**ACTIVITIES LEADING TO SLEEP CHANGES**
Homework, sports, extracurricular activities, and part-time jobs can all lead to decreased sleep for adolescents since they may cause adolescents to stay up even later at night to get everything done.

**LESS SLEEP CAN LEAD TO HEALTH AND SCHOOL PROBLEMS**
Large numbers of research studies of adolescent sleep have shown that typical adolescents are chronically not getting enough sleep and tired in a way that impacts their health.

Health problems from chronically not getting enough sleep include changes in mood, attention, memory, behavior control, and enjoyment of life. Lack of sleep is also likely to impact how adolescents learn and may lead to lower grades in school. Other health concerns resulting from being tired include:

- Increased risk of driving accidents because of being sleepy
- Decreased exercise leading to a higher risk for weight gain and obesity
- Increased use of stimulants

**CHANGING SCHOOL SCHEDULES LEADS TO CHANGING SLEEP SCHEDULES**
One way in which sleep schedules may be changed to help adolescents get more sleep is by allowing more opportunities to sleep later into the morning. A study in this month’s Archives looked at changing a school start time from 8 AM to 8:30 AM; this change led to adolescents reporting more satisfaction with sleep, improved motivation, and better class attendance. This change also resulted in adolescents reporting decreased sleepiness, tiredness, and depressed mood.

**HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR ADOLESCENT GET BETTER SLEEP?**
- Help your adolescent have a quiet bedroom. Turn off the television, cell phone, computer, and game machines.
- Limit the amount of caffeine, including caffeinated sodas, coffee, tea, chocolate, and energy drinks. These can cause you to stay up later and have trouble falling asleep.
- Encourage exercise. Getting enough exercise not only helps you stay fit but can help you fall asleep better and sleep more deeply.
- Teach your adolescent that your bed is the place you sleep, not the place to work on the computer, text friends, or worry about school.
- Wind down before bed for at least 30 minutes—read, listen to music, or take a bath or shower.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Stanford Sleep Clinic
http://www.stanford.edu/~dement/adolescent.html

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To find this and other Advice for Patients articles, go to the Advice for Patients link on the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine Web site at http://www.archpediatrics.com.

Source: Stanford Sleep Clinic.

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