

# SLEEP

Sleep and adolescents

Many teenagers are sleep deprived. They need a minimum of nine hours sleep, but it seems, many get only 7 ½ hours sleep per night.



There is no sleep bank. Sleep cannot be accumulated for the future. A young person can't sleep for twelve hours to put some hours in the sleep bank. They can, however, sleep for twelve hours when they are sleep deprived. So sleeping in on weekends is an option for many teenagers.

## THE SLEEP CLOCK CHANGES

The biological sleep clock shifts for young people. Until age 10 kids tend to wake up fresh and ready for the day. For teens their clock has shifted. Many wake up feeling tired and irritable as the sleep clock says they should still be sleeping early in the morning. For most teens there is a 'forbidden sleep zone' around 9 or 10 o'clock at night. They are alive and alert at these times. Ironically, as their parents move toward middle age their sleep clocks shift forward and they just want to sleep at these times. Teens tend to have a sleep trough in the afternoon but peak up at night. Many sleep researchers in the United States

are pushing for later school start times in secondary school to maximise alert times for learning

## SLEEP CONSOLIDATES LEARNING

A good night's sleep sets a teenager up to maximise learning opportunities on the following day. Sleep also helps consolidate learning that took place during the day. Sleep research has shown that the brain practises and consolidates what it has learned during the day when they are asleep. So not only does sufficient sleep help future learning by ensuring a student is fresh, it consolidates past learning.

## SETTING TEENAGERS UP FOR SLEEP

Many teenagers experience sleep problems due to stress and anxiety about school and relationships. Helping your young person deal with these issues can greatly enhance the amount of sleep they have. A healthy diet and plenty of exercise sets young people up for sleep. Turning computer screens off thirty minutes before bed also helps them prepare for sleep.

## KEEP IN MIND

1. Ensure your young person gets sufficient sleep but be aware that this may mean altering bedtimes and get up times if possible. This can be tricky during the school week but a mad dash to school in the morning may be the best option if it means they get an extra 30 minutes sleep.
2. Allow them to catch-up on lost sleep at weekends with a long sleep-in. Many need it.
3. Be prepared to talk with teens at night when they are alert – the midnight hours can present the best communication opportunities for parents. This can be disconcerting for parents whose sleep comes forward as they move toward middle age.



Parenting *ideas*  
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