

Teen Sleep Deprivation

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Sleep deprivation is a general term to describe a state caused by inadequate quantity or quality of sleep, including voluntary or involuntary sleeplessness. Sleep is as important to the human body as food and water, but most teens do not get enough sleep. This lack of sleep causes moodiness, irritability, frustration, and a lack of ability to regulate emotions and attention span. Lack of mood regulation can lead to increased anxiety, panic attacks, angry outbursts, impulsivity, and extreme reactions. Teens who do not get enough sleep are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as drinking, driving fast, and engaging in other dangerous activities including refusal to wear protective gear, believing that the dangers inherent in activities do not apply to them and that they are in some way invincible. Inadequate sleep also causes neurological issues such as problems with attention, memory, decision making, reaction time, and creativity.

Teens who do not get enough sleep are more apt to get poor grades in school, fall asleep in school, and have school tardiness/absences. They are at a higher risk for obesity and poor metabolic regulation and do not make good decisions about their health or eating habits. Because their body does not have the time to regulate, rebuild white cells and stabilize body chemicals during sleep, they are more likely to catch a cold or lose some of the ability to fight infection.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated occurrence. Studies show that approximately six out of ten middle school students and seven out of ten high school students do not get sufficient sleep on school nights. Even as little as one hour too little sleep at night can cause concentration and reaction time to suffer. This becomes potentially deadly when a teen is behind the wheel of a car. Research studies show that if a person is operating a vehicle with only four to five hours of sleep, it causes the same impaired reactions as driving drunk with twice the legal limit of alcohol, increasing the chance of a crash to ten times! Teens are repeatedly taught about the dangers of driving under the influence, but unfortunately, very little is taught about the dangers of driving with too little sleep. Studies from The Center for Disease Control (CDC) show that less than a third of the population don't even get as much as seven hours of sleep at night.

What is the recommended amount of sleep? The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that teenagers between 13–18 years should get between eight to ten hours of sleep in a 24-hour period. Due to busy school, work, and extracurricular activity schedules, it can be difficult for teens to get enough sleep. In fact, many teens struggle with falling asleep at night. There are some techniques to help teens get the sleep that they need. Consistency is a key factor. Teens need to have a consistent sleep schedule. They need to go to sleep and get up at approximately the same time each day – *even on the weekends*. Limiting light and exposure to technology, including phones, TV, gaming devices, and computers for thirty to sixty minutes before bedtime helps their mind and body relax and go to sleep more efficiently. Creating a sleep space that is quiet, dark, relaxing and at a comfortable temperature will also help. Avoiding large meals and caffeine before bedtime helps the body and mind slow down to enable sleep. Getting adequate exercise during the day will also help with falling asleep better at night.

Society recognizes and teaches the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, but often sees an inadequate amount of sleep as an inconvenience that can be overcome with caffeine or extra sleep on the weekend. Educating teens about the consequences of not getting enough sleep and strategies that can help them improve may literally save their life.

Sources:

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