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# Sleep and Teens



Sleep is food for the brain. During sleep, important body functions and brain activity occur. Skipping sleep CAN be harmful – even deadly, particularly if you are behind the wheel. You can look bad, you may feel moody, and you perform poorly. Sleepiness can make it hard to get along with your family and friends and hurt your scores on school exams, on the court or on the field. Remember: A brain that is hungry for sleep will get it, even when you don't expect it. For example, drowsiness and falling asleep at the wheel cause more than 100,000 car crashes every year. When you do not get enough sleep, you are more likely to have an accident, injury and/or illness.

## What are the facts about Sleep and Teens?

- \* Sleep is **vital to your well being**, as important as the air you breathe, the water you drink and the food you eat. It can even help you to eat better and manage the stress of being a teen.
- \* Biological sleep patterns **shift** toward later times for both sleeping and waking during adolescence – meaning it is natural to not be able to fall asleep before 11:00 pm.
- \* Teens **need** about 9¼ hours of sleep each night to function best (for some, 8½ hours is enough). Most teens DO NOT get enough sleep – one study found that only 15% reported sleeping 8½ hours on school nights.
- \* Teens tend to have **irregular sleep patterns** across the week – they typically stay up late and sleep in late on the weekends, which can affect their biological clocks and hurt the quality of their sleep.
- \* Many teens suffer from **treatable sleep disorders** such as narcolepsy, insomnia, restless legs syndrome or sleep apnea.

## Sleep Deprivation has Serious Consequences

Not getting enough sleep or having sleep difficulties can:

- \* *Limit your ability to learn, listen, concentrate and solve problems. You may even forget important information like names, numbers, your homework or a date with a special person in your life;*
- \* *Make you more prone to pimples. Lack of sleep can contribute to acne and other skin problems;*
- \* *Lead to aggressive or inappropriate behavior such as yelling at your friends or being impatient with your teachers or family members;*
- \* *Cause you to eat too much or eat unhealthy foods like sweets and fried foods that lead to weight gain;*
- \* *Heighten the effects of alcohol and possibly increase use of caffeine and nicotine; and*
- \* *Contribute to illness, not using equipment safely or driving drowsy.*

*continued*



# What does Teen Sleep have to do with School Start Times?

*Is your brain still on the pillow when school starts?*



If teens need about 9 1/4 hours of sleep to do their best and naturally go to sleep around 11:00 pm, one way to get more sleep is to start school later.

Teens' natural sleep cycle puts them in conflict with school start times. Most high school students need an alarm clock or a parent to wake them on school days. They are like zombies getting ready for school and find it hard to be alert and pay attention in class. Because they are sleep deprived, they are sleepy all day and cannot do their best.

Schools that have set later bell times find that students do not go to bed later, but get one hour more of sleep per school night, which means five hours more per week.

Enrollment and attendance improves and students are more likely to be on time when school starts.

Parents and teachers report that teens are more alert in the morning and in better moods; they are less likely to feel depressed or need to visit the nurse or school counselor.

To learn more about how you can be sleep-smart and help your school, visit [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org). This toolkit, contains an advocacy guide and other materials and tools are available to assist you and others to conduct a campaign for sleep-friendly schools.



*"It has been the single most significant thing we have done recently to improve student morale and attitudes."*

Kenneth Dragseth, Superintendent, Edina, Minnesota

*"Schedules should reflect a high value for learning."*

Parent

*The change is "really nice, because I feel ready to learn when I get to school in the morning."*

Student



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*Waking America to the Importance of Sleep®*

[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)