

ADOLESCENT SLEEP

Teenagers today are often sleep deprived. There are many reasons for this. They have a natural tendency to fall asleep later and wake later. During the adolescent growth spurt sleep needs actually increase. Teenage bedrooms have become entertainment centres so that many teenagers do to their bedrooms to watch TV, play on the computer or listen to music....anything but sleep. Teenagers may work part-time and have busy extra-curricular lives. In these cases, sleep is often sacrificed for these activities.

The end result of these problems and others means that today's teenagers are one of the most sleep deprived groups in our community.

There are a number of facts that parents and teenagers should keep in mind.

- 1) Teens during the growth spurt years require more sleep. On average they need 9¼ hours of sleep per night. Most don't get this.
- 2) Studies of teenagers reveal the following:
 - Up to 40% of teens are sleepy.
 - 5% of teens are so sleep deprived they are wasting their time going to school – learning would be near impossible that's at least one child per class in high school.
 - Up to 20% of teenagers nod off regularly at school and this is often not witnessed as these naps are very short.
- 3) Teens who are sleep deprived are more likely to have falling grades, engage in substance abuse and have accidents (including motor vehicle accidents when they drive).
- 4) Being deprived of one hour of sleep per night for 2 weeks results in a 5% drop in grades! The more sleep deprived the worse the decline in academic performance.
- 5) Impaired sleep can result in more physical illnesses due to an impaired immune system.

Sleep deprivation has been shown to cause mood disorders including depression and anxiety. Teens who are deprived are temperamental, have poor short term memories, and inattentive as well as impulsive and have significant processing problems. (The

latter reveals itself in poor grades due to inability to absorb new information). Often these symptoms are misinterpreted as being normal for a teenager.

Often daytime problems are felt to cause the sleeping problems because the focus is on the problem occurring in the daytime. You need, as parents to be aware of the strong possibility of sleep problems being the main issue affecting teenager's lives.

Sleep disorders in the teenage years are common and include delayed sleep phase disorder, sleep apnoea, as well as periodic limb movement disorder.

Delayed sleep phase disorder is a body clock problem which affects at least 25% of teenagers. They have difficulty falling asleep at night and waking up in the morning. These children have great difficulty at school in the morning because their brains are still in sleep mode. They tend to be more alert after lunch and are at their brightest in the evening after school. During the week they get more sleep deprived and are more alert on weekends when they are sleeping.

Most sleep problems in teenagers are treatable and the initial step in understanding the problems is awareness. If you are concerned about your child's sleep then purposeful steps should be taken to overcome the problem. The teenager needs to be aware of the issues and have the problem explained to them. Their cooperation is essential for successfully treating their sleep and the commonest problem in that if it's allowed to go on for too long so that secondary behavioural problems make it difficult.

What do you do if you consider your child has a sleep problem?

- 1) Be aware of what normal sleep is...about 9 hours sleep is normal for teenagers and it should generally be unbroken and refreshing.
- 2) If your child has learning or behavioural problems consider abnormal sleep to be a precipitating factor.
- 3) Keep a sleep diary of your child's sleep for two weeks and if it appears abnormal you should discuss this with a health professional.