

Sleep disturbances affect classroom performance

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As a night of bad sleep can have an adverse effect on an adult's performance at work the next day, an insufficient amount of rest can also have a negative impact on how well middle or high school students perform in the classroom. A study published in the February 15th issue of the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine (JCSM) finds that adolescents who experience sleep disturbances are more likely to receive bad grades in school.

James F. Pagel, MD, of the University of Colorado School of Medicine, examined the results of 238 school district-approved questionnaires, filled out by students attending middle school or high school, which included a high frequency of sleep complaints. According to the surveys, students with lower grade point averages (GPAs) were more likely to have restless, aching legs when trying to fall asleep, difficulty concentrating during the day, snoring every night, a hard time waking up in the morning, sleepiness during the day, and falling asleep in class.

"While a series of previously-conducted studies all found that adolescents reporting inadequate sleep, irregular sleep patterns, and/or poor sleep quality do not perform as well in school as students without sleep complaints, this study provides additional evidence indicating that sleep disturbances occur at high frequencies in adolescents and significantly affect daytime performance, as measured by GPA," said Pagel.

Both restless legs and difficulty concentrating during the day are

symptoms associated with the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a diagnosis that can be associated with poor school performance. It is important for parents to discuss their teen's sleep-related problem with a primary care physician, and to have their teen screened for ADHD if necessary, added Pagel.

Teens are advised to follow these recommendations to getting a good night's sleep, which will help lead to better school performance:

- Get a full night's sleep on a regular basis. Do not stay up all hours of the night to "cram" for an exam, do homework, etc. If extracurricular activities at school are proving to be too time-consuming, consider cutting back.
- If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, then get out of the bed and do something relaxing, such as reading a book or listening to music, until you are tired enough to go back to bed.
- Get up at the same time every morning.
- Avoid taking naps after school if you can. If you need to lie down, do not do so for more than an hour.
- Keep a regular schedule.
- Don't read, write, eat, watch TV, talk on the phone or play cards in bed.
- Do not have any caffeine after lunch.
- Do not go to bed hungry, but don't eat a big meal before bedtime either.

- Avoid any rigorous exercise within six hours of your bedtime.
- Try to get rid of or deal with things that make you worry.
- Make your bedroom quiet, dark and a little bit cool.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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