

The importance of sleep during the teen years

August 3 2023, by Aaron Nieto



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With busy schedules full of challenges ranging from extra curriculars to college applications, it can be difficult for teenagers to get enough sleep. An expert at Baylor College of Medicine discusses the importance of a full night's sleep and keeping a manageable schedule for high schoolers.

"A good sleep [schedule](#) is one that has good quality, quantity and consistency," said Dr. Sonal Malhotra, assistant professor of pediatrics—pulmonary and sleep medicine and associate program director of the sleep medicine fellowship at Baylor and Texas Children's Hospital. "At this age, kids are trying to learn as much as they can while doing extracurriculars and being social, so their [sleep time](#) is important for their bodies to relax and reset from the day."

Malhotra offers a few tips on upkeeping [teens'](#) sleep schedule this [school year](#):

- Take two weeks to develop new sleep habits, either for the upcoming [school](#) year or for the time changes in the school year.
- Teens need at least 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night.
- Teens should take 30 to 45 minutes to wind down for the night, ideally in their beds without screens.
- On the weekends, teens should try not to shift their sleep schedule more than one hour, so their weekday schedules are not disrupted (i.e. if they generally go to sleep at 9 p.m. and wake up at 6 a.m. then on weekends they can go to sleep at 10 p.m. and wake up at 7 a.m.).
- Parents and teens should work to create a study space outside of the bed so that it remains a place of rest.
- After-school naps are okay, but teens should take naps right after school and limit them to 30 minutes.
- Avoid caffeine after school hours.

A consistent and adequate sleep schedule allows for growth hormones to be released, increased [immune system function](#) and reduction in inflammation in the body. Sleep also is important for learning, as this is when the body is able consolidate memories and retain information learned throughout the day. Lack of sleep can lead teens to experience inattentiveness in school and increases their chances of developing

comorbidities such as cardiovascular disorders.

Part of a healthy sleep schedule is a healthy [sleep](#) environment. Bedrooms should be cool, dark places with few distractions. Televisions, gaming systems, laptops and even cell phones are best left out of the bedroom, as these distractions can condition teens to pay attention to them, rather than resting.

Some teens may be looking to go the extra mile in their schoolwork, but Malhotra says it is the role of the parent to ensure their children have balanced schedules. Teens with too much on their plate will become stressed physically or mentally, which can prevent them from being able to wind down and fall asleep. If teens stay up too late trying to study, the brain will not have the rest needed to retain what is being absorbed late at night as well as during the day.

"Sleep is just as important as having volunteering, sports and good grades on a college application," Malhotra said. "Teens should be able to give themselves a little grace in their schoolwork so that their health isn't sacrificed for a good grade."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

Citation: The importance of sleep during the teen years (2023, August 3) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-08-importance-teen-years.html>

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