

New study reveals how screen time affects preteen sleep

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The US Surgeon General recently recommended a warning label for social media platforms due to concerns about their impact on youth mental health. The Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and

Youth Mental Health highlighted potential links between social media use and poor sleep quality in youth. Considering these concerns, what specific actions can adolescents and parents take to improve sleep?

A new national study, published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, offers insights into screen habits linked with better sleep.

"Ensuring adolescents get enough sleep is vital, as it supports their physical and mental growth and development," says lead author Jason Nagata, MD, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. "Our research found that leaving notifications on, even in silent mode, leads to less sleep compared to turning the phone off completely or keeping it outside the bedroom."

Tips include:

- Keep screens outside of the bedroom. Having a TV set or internet-connected device in the bedroom was associated with shorter sleep duration.
- Turn off the phone. Leaving the phone ringer on or turning notifications to silent or vibrate was associated with less sleep compared to turning the phone off entirely. Leaving the phone ringer on was associated with a 25% higher risk of sleep disturbance compared to turning it off. 16.2% of adolescents reported having a [phone call](#), [text message](#), or e-mail wake them up after trying to go to sleep in the past week.
- Don't use social media or other electronic devices before going to sleep. Using social media, chatting on the internet, playing video games, browsing the internet, and watching or streaming movies, videos, or TV shows while in bed before sleeping were all associated with less sleep.
- If you wake up during the night, don't use your phone or engage with social media. One fifth of adolescents reported that they

used their phone or other device after waking up during the night in the past week. This was associated with less sleep overnight.

The researchers analyzed data from 9,398 preteens aged 11-12 who are part of the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study, the largest long-term study of brain development and child health in the United States. Data were collected from 2018-2021.

The adolescents and their parents answered questions about their sleep habits and youth were asked about their screen and social media use at bedtime. A quarter of preteens had sleep disturbance. 16.2% reported being woken up by [phone calls](#), text messages, or emails while sleeping at least once in the past week. Furthermore, 19.3% reported using their phone or another device if they woke up overnight.

"Adolescents can be extremely sensitive to phone notifications, often waking up instantly when they hear their phone," said Nagata. "Even if a phone is on silent or vibrate, [adolescents](#) may still check it overnight. Once they start reading or responding to messages, they can become more alert and activated."

"Adolescent development is a challenging time for many given the [social pressures](#) and physical, psychological, and emotional changes that occur," said co-author, Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "Understanding this process and being present to support [youth](#) in their social media use is crucial."

More information: Jason M. Nagata et al, Bedtime Screen Use Behaviors and Sleep Outcomes in Early Adolescents: A Prospective Cohort Study, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2024.06.006](#)

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