

Researchers investigate sleep's role in emotional experiences for teens

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Researchers at the FIU Center for Children and Families are trying to uncover the role that sleep plays in processing emotional experiences, to improve treatments for youth with anxiety.

The Emotional Memory Unification (EMU) study, led by FIU psychologist and Associate Professor Dana McMakin, and FIU neuroscientist and Assistant Professor Aaron Mattfeld, is the result of a \$3.6 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), in collaboration with Nicklaus Children's Hospital.

The five-year study, co-led by Department of Psychology Chairman Jeremy Pettit, seeks to recruit 260 children ages 10-13. Participants will be part of the study for two to four weeks and will complete computer tasks and games while in a [magnetic resonance](#) imaging (MRI) scanner; wear a wristwatch to monitor their [sleep](#) and daily activity; and potentially spend a night at Nicklaus Children's Hospital's Sleep Lab.

"We know that sleep is essential for healthy brain development in adolescence, and not getting enough sleep can be very hard on teens' emotional and physical health," McMakin said. "Anxiety and [lack of sleep](#) among youth is very common, and this study will help us better understand how they are related so we can improve treatments for youth."

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 70 percent of U.S. teens aged 12-14 get insufficient sleep, and 90 percent of youth that experience anxiety report that they also have sleep-related problems. Adolescents' biological sleep patterns— including sleeping and waking—are shifted later, yet many school schedules start early in the morning.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends 9-11 [hours of sleep](#) for children 6-13 years old and 8-10 hours of sleep for 14-17-year-olds. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, sleeping the recommended number of hours is associated with better attention, learning and memory; better regulation of behaviors and emotion; and higher quality of life, mental and physical health.

Tips for healthy teen sleep include:

- Stick to a sleep schedule—even on weekends.
- Practice a relaxing [bedtime](#) ritual about 30 minutes before bedtime, such as reading a book or taking a warm shower.
- Exercise regularly but avoid it within a few hours of bedtime.
- Make your bedroom comfortable by setting the ideal temperature, sound and light. Avoid bright environments during bedtime, loud sounds that may affect your sleep, or a room that is either too cold or too hot.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow.
- Avoid caffeine after 3 p.m.
- Avoid electronics and other activities an

hour before bed, such as homework, watching TV or playing video games. Focus your bedtime on trying to sleep, not on other activities.

- Keep naps brief (20-30 minutes) and no later than 4 p.m.

If you would like to learn more about the EMU study or find out if your child is eligible to participate, please submit your contact information through [this form](#), call 305-348-5384, or email emu-study@fiu.edu.

Provided by Florida International University

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