

Try This: How to promote good sleep hygiene

According to a number of studies, not getting enough sleep can lead to irritability, fatigue, aggression, poor grades and weight gain. One study of 3,120 high-school students found young people who had C, D, or F grades averaged 25 minutes less sleep per weeknight than those who had A or B grades. Still, 70% of Canadian adolescents say they don't get the recommended eight to nine hours of sleep per night.

Please consider sharing these tips with parents in your school.

Here is what you can do to promote a good night's sleep:

- 1. Make the bedroom screen-free.** There are many reasons why electronic devices like phones or TVs should be banned from the bedroom. To start, they emit blue light which suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone responsible for sleep. According to one study, people who read on light-emitting devices before bed took longer to fall asleep, had less REM sleep (the phase that helps you remember what you learned), and felt less rested than people who read print books. What's more, one in ten teens report being woken up almost every night by a call, text, or email. Yet, half of parents taking part in an Alberta survey said their grade five child had a TV, DVD player and/or gaming console in their room. A further 21% had computers while 17% had cellphones.
- 2. Keep an eye on caffeine.** Caffeine blocks a sleep-promoting chemical called adenosine, making you feel more awake. The effects of caffeine can last from six to 14 hours, which means if your child consumes caffeine in the afternoon or evening, it could keep him or her up well into the night. Health Canada recommends **children aged 10 to 12** get a maximum of 85 milligrams of caffeine a day, but one study showed that same age group consumed an average of 109 milligrams a day. The study also found the more caffeine a child consumed, the more likely he or she was to have difficulty falling asleep. Parents should watch out for energy drinks in particular. Brands like Red Bull and Full Throttle can have up to 144 mg of caffeine per can.
- 3. Get active at the right time.** If possible, set your child's sports practice for the late afternoon or early evening. While evidence shows getting active leads to deeper, more restorative sleep, exercising immediately before bedtime can interfere with the sleep of some people.
- 4. Set a sleep schedule.** Try to encourage going to bed and waking up around the same time every day, even on weekends. A survey of more than 2,600 students in Korea found those who got catch-up sleep on the weekend had shorter attention spans and more attention-related problems than those who got a regular amount of sleep each night. Waking up within two hours of the usual wake-up time on Sunday can make Monday much more pleasant and productive.
- 5. Promote a relaxing routine before bed.** Work on developing a routine that will clearly separate bedtime from the day's activities. This signals to the body that it's time to go to sleep. Some ideas include having a warm shower, letting some fresh air into the room, dimming the lights, drinking a warm cup of non-caffeinated tea or milk, listening to music and reading a magazine or book.
- 6. Keep it cool.** Studies show setting the thermostat to 18.5 °C can help you fall asleep faster. If you don't control the heating, cutting down on blankets or opening a window can help.
- 7. Avoid hunger.** It's hard to sleep when you're hungry. Research has shown people with insomnia sleep better when they have a snack before bed. Eating a good dinner is the best solution. However, if kids need a bedtime bite, try offering something light like a few whole wheat crackers with peanut butter, a small amount of cereal and milk, or some roasted soya beans or sunflower seeds. A recent small study also showed eating two kiwis one hour before bedtime can lead to improved sleep.

Warning signs of not getting enough sleep:

- yawning
- rubbing eyes
- routinely falling asleep in class, in the car, or in front of the TV
- hyperactivity
- being aggressive
- moody, cranky
- easily frustrated or annoyed
- difficulty concentrating, starting or completing tasks
- difficulty following directions
- difficulty waking up in the morning

- 8. Pull the curtains and let some sun in.** Bright lights help reset your biological clock in the morning, so opening the curtains can provide a great wake-up call. Research also shows when people are exposed to sunlight in the morning, they start producing melatonin sooner at night and fall asleep more easily.

Sources:

J Can Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry, 23:3, September 2014 177 Position Statement on Pediatric Sleep for Psychiatrists and ability to cope with stress, regulate emotions, socialize and be productive. 1.2.1

Kim, S. J., Lee, Y. J., Cho, S., Cho, I., Lim, W., & Lim, W. (2011). Relationship between weekend catch-up sleep and poor performance on attention tasks in Korean adolescents. Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine, 165(9), 806-812.