

## GROWING UP

### Have Teens Make Room for Sleep

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

“I only got four hours of sleep last night because I was cramming for the exam today,” said Matt to one of his teenage friends. “Oh yeah, I just got a couple of hours of sleep as I had to study for two exams today,” replied his friend. This type of exchange is common as sleep is often viewed by adolescents as a luxury and not a necessity.

Perhaps this is why there is a steady erosion in the average number of hours of sleep adolescents receive on a given night. A recent study in Sweden found that adolescents are averaging 30 minutes less sleep per night than adolescents received 20 years ago. Part of the blame on the decrease in sleep was on the increased use of cell phones and social media late into the night.

However, blaming media for adolescent sleep deprivation is only part of the cause. While most families report that getting a good night’s sleep is a high priority, many feel it’s a huge challenge to fit into busy family schedules. Most adolescents need to get between 8½ to 9¼ hours of sleep per night. That means they should be asleep by 10 p.m. to get up by 6:30 a.m. That can be very difficult to achieve as many teens have outside activities that keep them busy until early evening and then they have to finish homework for the next day.

Despite all of the everyday demands that eat into a good night’s rest, it is worth putting sleep as a priority. A lack of sleep can have negative influences on both body and mind. Inadequate sleep can influence appetite by making the body crave empty carbohydrates and sugars. It also signals the body to store more fat and increase insulin sensitivity. Poor sleep causes inattention, difficulty focusing, and poorer academic performance.

There are several steps that parents can take to address their adolescents’ sleep deprivation. First, keep a regular schedule so that bedtime occurs at the same time every night. Second, have all electronic devices turned off at least an hour before heading off to bed. Parents need to model this behavior as adults are often as guilty as adolescents in using their cell phones or tablets right before going to bed. Third, make sure to not drink caffeinated drinks at least three hours before planning to go to bed. Finally, if teens are unable to get a solid night’s sleep a short nap that is under 30 minutes can be restorative. Just make sure to take the nap before 5 p.m. so it doesn’t disrupt the upcoming night’s sleep.

Make it a priority for your teenager to get a good night’s rest despite the challenges. Your teenager might be surprised at how good it feels.

#### Biography:

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