

Understanding Teen Sleep Needs and Mental Health



With Dr Faith Orchard



Teens are full of potential and energy, yet they often find themselves exhausted and perpetually sleepy. Research indicates that most teens don't get the amount of sleep they need each day and while individual sleep requirements can vary from one teen to another, it supports growth, cognitive development, attention, concentration, memory, and is essential for both physical and overall good mental health & wellbeing.

How much is enough?

- **Duration:** Teenagers typically need 8-10 hours of sleep, but some may need as little as 7 or as much as 11 hours.
- **Quality vs. Quantity:** Both are important. Monitor their mood, behaviour, and daily functioning to ensure they are getting enough sleep.

A shift in sleep:

- **Body Clock Shifts:** A natural shift of 2 hours in teen circadian rhythms keeps them up later and sleeping in longer.
- **Morning vs. Night:** About 25-30% are morning larks, 25-30% are night owls, with the rest in between.



Spotting the Signs

Parents may notice some of the signs that their teen is not getting enough sleep. See if they show some of these signs:

- Has trouble waking up most mornings
- Acts irritable in the early afternoon
- Falls asleep easily during the day
- Has a drop in grades
- Sleeps for very long periods on the weekends
- Huge swings in emotions and moods

Lack of sleep can sometimes be mistaken for ADHD, as both share similar symptoms. The most common ones are:

- Trouble concentrating
- Mood swings
- Hyperactivity
- Nervousness
- Aggressive behaviour

Encouraging Healthy Sleep Patterns in Teens:

- **View of Sleep:** Teens can see sleep as something that gets in the way of things they want to do, which is something they need to overcome.
- **Exercise:** Promote physical activity during the day with plenty of daylight exposure, and establish a calming evening routine.
- **Regular routine:** Help them maintain a regular sleep schedule. Even at weekends and holidays, try to limit lie-ins to 90 minutes extra.
- **Napping:** Limit or eliminate naps, especially if they interfere with nighttime sleep.
- **Positive Brain Associations:** Create a cozy, calm environment and stick to a consistent bedtime routine.
- **Sleep Readiness:** Ensure teens go to bed when they feel tired, not too early and not too late.
- **Pre-Sleep Arousal:** If teens can't sleep after 15-20 minutes, get them to try a calming activity before trying to sleep again.
- **Flow state:** Interactive tech (gaming or scrolling on socials) can delay sleep so reduce this before bed and encourage more passive, winding down activities such as reading or watching TV instead.
- **Avoid Stress:** Steer clear of arguments close to bedtime to prevent sleep disruption from stress hormones.
- **Mindfulness:** Use mindfulness apps and relaxation techniques to help teens relax.
- **Hormones:** Hormones can play a significant role in sleep regulation. Monthly cycles and other hormonal changes can impact sleep quality..



Lack of Sleep and Impact:

- **Learning and Focus:** Sleep deficiency impairs learning, focus, and decision-making, which can cause difficulties with memory and increase mistakes in schoolwork.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Insufficient sleep disrupts emotional processing and mood stability, increasing the risk of mental health issues.
- **Physical Health:** Lack of sleep affects hunger hormones, potentially leading to weight gain.
- **Motivation:** Sleep loss can cause a lack of motivation, which can lead to mood changes making teens feel irritable, frustrated and unmotivated. It can reduce cognitive motivation including the willingness to exert effort.

Addressing Persistent Sleep Issues

- **Regular Wake-Up Time:** Consistent wake-up times help reset the body clock.
- **Light Exposure:** Use natural light or a bright light device in the morning.
- **Gradual Adjustments:** For delayed sleep phase, try gradually shifting bedtime and rise time 15 minutes earlier each day to readjust their internal clock.

Practical Tips for Parents

- **Model Behaviour:** Demonstrate good relaxation habits, especially around use of technology.
- **Negotiation and Autonomy:** Discuss and agree on a sleep routine with your teen.
- **Boundaries:** Set clear boundaries around bedtime and tech use, but listen and be flexible.

When to Seek Help:

- **Persistent Issues:** If sleep issues persist or significantly impact your teen's well-being, consult your GP or a healthcare professional.
- **Mental Health Concerns:** Address signs of emotional distress including low mood or anxiety; seek professional help if needed.

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Parents play a crucial role in helping teens develop good sleep habits. By encouraging consistent sleep routines, limiting screen time before bed, and creating a calming environment, parents can help their teens establish healthy sleep practices. which support their overall well-being. ”

Dr Faith Orchard



There are sessions on the **Let's all Talk Mental Health hub** for you to view on Teen Sleep issues including the talks linked below. All talks are provided FREE to watch by your school.



Additional Resources:

- Mindfulness Apps: Apps like Calm and Headspace for relaxation exercises - [CAMHS recommended resources](#)
- Techniques: Progressive muscle relaxation and visualisation can aid in winding down.
- [Sleep Patterns and Associations with Anxiety & Depression](#) - Dr Faith Orchard

This factsheet is for advice purposes. Please remember that we're not offering medical or clinical health services specific to your situation. If you need help, please contact your GP or other healthcare professionals – don't wait to get help if you or your young one needs it.