



# The Importance of Sleep

A Self Help Guide for  
Students and Parents

# Sleep .....



## Why do we need sleep?

We tend to think of sleep as a time when the mind and body shut down. But this is not the case; sleep is an active period in which a lot of important processing, restoration, and strengthening occurs. Exactly how this happens and why our bodies are programmed for such a long period of slumber is still somewhat of a mystery. But scientists do understand some of sleep's critical functions, and the reasons we need it for optimal health and wellbeing.

## What does it do?

Sleep is important. If you get too little sleep both behaviour and learning can be affected. One of the vital roles of sleep is to help us solidify and consolidate memories. As we go about our day, our brains take in an incredible amount of information. Rather than being directly logged and recorded, however, these facts and experiences first need to be processed and stored; and many of these steps happen while we sleep. Overnight, bits and pieces of information are transferred from more tentative, short-term memory to stronger, long-term memory—a process called "consolidation." Researchers have also shown that after people sleep, they tend to retain information and perform better on memory tasks. Our bodies all require long periods of sleep in order to restore and rejuvenate, to grow muscle, repair tissue, and synthesize hormones.

## How much sleep do I need?

Healthy sleep is critical for everyone, since we all need to retain information and learn skills to thrive in life. But this is likely part of the reason children—who acquire language, social, and motor skills at a breathtaking pace throughout their development—need more sleep than adults. While adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night, one-year-olds need roughly 11 to 14 hours, school age children between 9 and 11, **and teenagers between 8 and 10 hours.** During these critical periods of growth and learning, younger people need a heavy dose of slumber for optimal development and alertness. It is important to understand that the hormone melatonin, which is one of the main triggers that makes us sleepy in the evenings, is released approximately two hours later among adolescents than in other age groups. Hence if young people stay up later at night, there is a genuine biological reason as their sleep patterns are different from those of other age groups.

## Can I just catch up on all this sleep on the weekend?

Unfortunately, a person can't just accumulate sleep deprivation and then log many hours of sleep to make up for it (although paying back "sleep debt" is always a good idea if you're sleep deprived). The best sleep habits are consistent, healthy routines that allow all of us, regardless of our age, to meet our sleep needs every night, and keep on top of life's challenges every day.

## **FUN FACTS:**

- Sleep is vital to your well-being, as important as the air you breathe, the water you drink and the food you eat. It can even help you to eat better and manage the stress of being a teen.
- Biological sleep patterns shift toward later times for both sleeping and waking during adolescence -- meaning it is natural to not be able to fall asleep before 11:00 pm.
- Teens need about 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night to function best. Most teens do not get enough sleep — one study found that only 15% reported sleeping 8 1/2 hours on school nights.
- Teens tend to have irregular sleep patterns across the week — they typically stay up late and sleep in late on the weekends, which can affect their biological clocks and hurt the quality of their sleep.
- Many teens suffer from treatable sleep disorders, such as narcolepsy, insomnia, restless legs syndrome or sleep apnoea.

## **Sleeping Do's and Sleeping Don'ts**

### **Do's**

- Establish a regular bedtime routine
- Exercise late afternoon /early evening
- Take a hot bath or shower a few hours before bedtime
- Make a comfortable sleep environment
- Be patient with yourself, sleep routines take time to bed in (!!) Getting upset about not sleeping will not help
- Turn your light on and read something easy if you can't get to sleep after a long period of time
- Count Sheep!! Counting breaths up and back from 10, 20, 50 etc. can help make you calmer
- Do a mental body scan, be mindful about how your body is feeling and this will help to focus and slow down your brain's mental activity
- Drink more during the day and limit fluids in the evening

### **Don'ts**

- Try too hard to go to sleep, instead try to tune in to your body's natural need for sleep
- Take daytime naps
- Have caffeine after 4pm. This includes energy drinks and tea
- Go to bed too hungry or too full
- Eat a lot of sugary foods prior to bedtime. The brain will go into overdrive trying to break all the sugar down
- Use your bed for studying, a wardrobe, watching TV, gaming or eating. Train yourself to know your bed is for rest and sleep
- Use electronic devices within the hour you plan to go to bed. This includes phones, laptops, tablets, TV. The blue light mimics natural light and this activates the brain and stops the sleep hormone from being released.
- Clock watch! This can make you more anxious and less likely to sleep. Set the alarm then turn the clock face away
- Eat spicy or acidic foods before bed e.g. Orange juice, peppery crisps
- Check the time or put the light on if you wake up. Instead just re-orientate yourself, get comfy and use breathing exercises to help your body calm so you can get back to sleep

## **WORKSHEET**

- Think about your sleep over the past week. What sort of sleep was it? e.g.: continuous, broken, disturbing dreams, very heavy
- How many hours do you think that you slept on average? Between what times?
- How did you feel when you woke up?
- What were you doing in the hours before you went to sleep?
- How do you feel what you haven't had enough sleep?

## **SLEEP PLAN**

- Devise a sleep routine to follow every night to prepare yourself for sleeping. This should involve putting electronics away one hour before lights off and activities to do to wind down.
- Prepare the space. How do you need your room to be in order to get to sleep / stay asleep?
- What else can you do or say to yourself to help with sleep?

## **Useful Information:**

<https://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep>