

# Should I be concerned with my teenager's sleep habits?

As a parent, we are constantly worried for our children. Their health, happiness, and success will always be a priority for us to nurture and support. Lately, I have had many inquiries about how important sleep is in adolescence, especially with the



**Dentally Speaking**  
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fast-paced lives of our children and continual juggling of daily activities and responsibilities. The importance of proper sleep behavior needs to be understood due to the affect it has on our overall health. Here are some of the frequently asked questions I receive about how sleep affects teenagers.

## How does sleep play a role in growth and development during adolescence?

Sleep is essential in the

growth and development of all children, but especially in adolescence. The brain is still developing in teens and sleep plays a major role in brain development. The pre-frontal cortex of the brain, which is responsible for cognitive thinking and decision making, is formed during these teenage years. Proper sleep patterns not only allow the body to produce proper growth hormones, but also allow the body to heal and repair itself.

## How greatly does a lack of sleep affect a teen's life?

Teens who are lacking healthy sleep are at risk for a wide range of intellectual, social, emotional and behavioral problems. Insufficient sleep in teens is linked to cognitive issues, diminished focus, greater risks for depression, and even attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The proper amount of sleep and consistent sleep patterns will result in better health, mental and emotional stability, and higher academic performance.

## Why do you think so many teens do not get a decent amount of sleep each night?

With the hectic lives of teenagers including the intensity of sports, the drive for academic success, and social pressures, sleep patterns suffer in adolescence. In addition, many teens utilize their smart phones, iPads, and other electronic devices whose lighted screens have been shown to suppress melatonin, which is the hormone that helps control sleep and wake cycles.

## What are the negative health complications that could arise from not getting enough sleep?

Like discussed above, cognitive issues (trouble with memory, diminished focus and attention, poor judgement and decision making), behavioral issues (hyperactivity, social withdrawal), and emotional issues (irritability and impaired moods, increased risk for depression). If a sleep breathing disorder is present like snoring or sleep apnea, huge health risks are possible including increased chance for cardiovascular disease, strokes, high blood pressure, diabetes, acid reflux, and migraines.

## How would I know if my teen has a sleep breathing disorder?

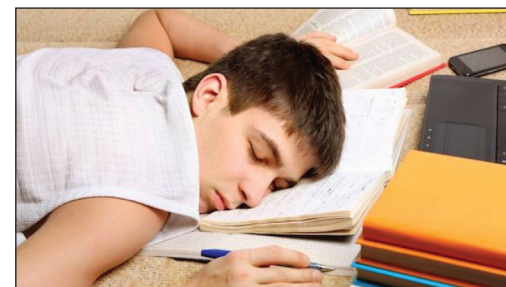
Some signs of a sleep breathing disorder include:

- Snoring
- Difficulty sleeping
- Daytime Drowsiness
- Feeling un-refreshed in morning
- Gasping when waking
- Morning Headaches
- Clenching or grinding teeth

If your teenager exhibits any or several of these symptoms, having them tested with a home sleep study or formal sleep study in a hospital will give you the data you need to identify a sleep breathing disorder like sleep apnea. Once this is identified, the proper treatment (a dental sleep appliance or a CPAP machine) will be recommended to you.

## Can a consistent lack of sleep in adolescence affect an individual for the rest of their life?

If sleep apnea is present, especially moderate or severe sleep apnea, serious health concerns (mentioned above) are possible that can absolutely have irreversible effects on a person's body. As far as poor sleep patterns go, if there is a negative effect on



academics, on emotional stability (depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts), or on behavioral habits, this can continue into adulthood and have an adverse effect on their health and well-being.

Sleep plays a crucial role in a person's physical and emotional stability. It provides healing for the body and allows proper growth and development to occur. If you suspect a sleep issue with any of your children, please have them evaluated by a sleep physician or dentist trained in sleep medicine. It could provide a solution in improving their quality of life and avoiding serious health repercussions.

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