



FOR ADOLESCENTS

sleep



How many hours of sleep does a teenager need?

On average 9 hours of sleep a night but some teenagers can cope with less sleep. The body clock alters in the teenage years which means that waking and sleeping times get later and later—this is normal.



How does lack of sleep affect teenagers?

- Heightened emotions—angry, sad, anxious, moody
- Limits ability to learn, listen, concentrate and solve problems.
- Can cause them eat too much or eat unhealthy foods like sweets and fried foods that lead to weight gain
- Increase risk of developing acne & skin problems
- Can lead to irritable, aggressive or inappropriate behaviour such as arguing with friends or being impatient with teachers or family members

Developing a sleep plan

- Parents/carers need to work in partnership with their child—not against them! Be supportive.
- Telling a teenager to do something will not very effective. Create a plan together so that they have some control.
- Write up a contract together and ask them what they think would help them fall asleep.
- What can parents/carers do also? Ask the child what parents should do in return if the child sticks to the routine.
- Parents/carers need to be good role models & implement healthy sleep habits themselves.
- Are parents/carers always on their screens or up late at night? How does this set an example to the child?
- Together implement a set bedtime routine and be consistent with this every day



Good Sleep Hygiene

Morning:

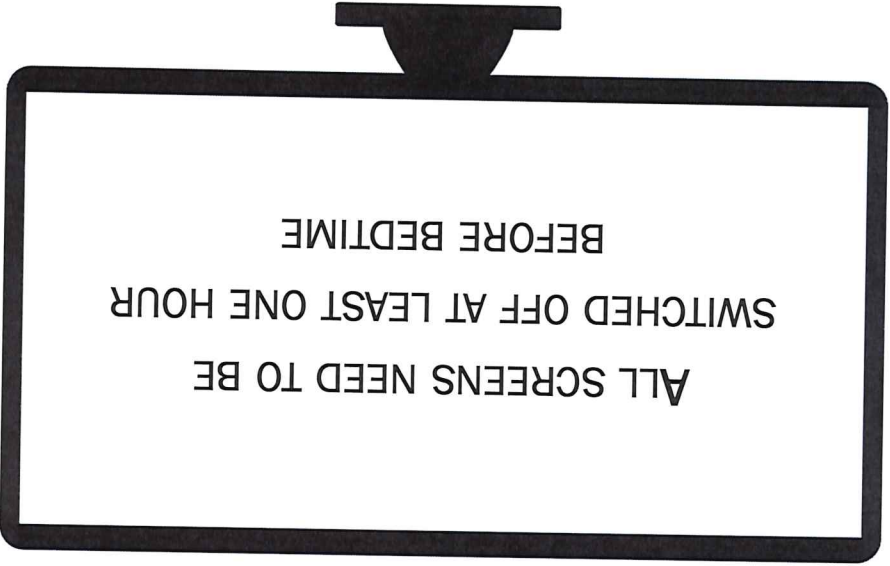
- Try and wake at the same time each morning
- Light helps to wake us up—open the curtains, turn on

Daytime:

- Be active and engage in some exercise as this can improve the quality of sleep at night
- Get as much natural light as possible during the day, especially in the morning. This will help the body produce melatonin at the right times in the sleep cycle.
- Avoid energy drinks and caffeine . If you must drink them then do so before 2pm.
- Talk about any worries at this time, so you are not taking those thoughts to bed.

Evening:

- Do not go to bed too full or hungry. Try to stick to regular mealtimes in the day. If you are hungry then have a small, low sugar snack
- Turn off screens at least 1 hour before bedtime & try to keep all electronics out of the bedroom
- Ensure that clocks are not visible to prevent clock watching
- Create a good bedroom environment. Is the room tidy? Is the mattress is comfortable? Is the lighting and temperature ok?



Screens!

Social media and gaming is very important to children and adolescents.

Increased screen time is associated with decreased sleep and poorer mental health.

The blue LED light from screens (phones, TVs, tablets etc.) suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin from being released so the brain does not think it is bedtime.

Getting screens out of the bedroom is a challenge for all parents.



What can parents/carers do?

- Have a conversation with your child about what is healthy screen time and set some limits together.
- Explain to your child the importance of sleep and why there needs to be limits on screen time.
- It can be helpful to talk to your child's friends and parents and setting a screen time limit together. If their friends are no longer online than they will feel better about being offline themselves.
- Swap the screen for relaxing activities instead e.g. drawing, reading, listening to music/podcasts/podcasts, radio, puzzles.

Typical sleep problems

Adolescents will have a shorter sleep duration on weeknights and will overcompensate on the weekend by having long lie ins, however this causes problems with trying to fall asleep at night.

What can you do?

⇒ Do not let your child oversleep for no longer than an hour on weekends

⇒ During school holidays, use the last 1-2 weeks before school starts again to get back into good sleep habits

The next pages will look at ways to manage sleep problems.

When using any of these strategies it is important to know that it can take a long time to see improvements with sleep pattern.

Be patient

Be consistent

Expect fall backs

Expect challenges

Keep going...



Bedtime Fading Approach/Phased Advancement

If your child is used to falling asleep past midnight, asking them to go to sleep before midnight is unrealistic for them.

Try this strategy:

- Temporarily set their bedtime to the time they are usually falling asleep e.g. 2am
- Encourage them to do relaxing, screen free activities before the bed time.
- Move the set bedtime back by 15mins every few nights e.g. 1:45am, then 1:30am etc. until an optimal bedtime is reached.
- This works well with anxious children as they are not lying awake for hours overthinking and worrying about falling asleep
- It is absolutely essential that their wake time is early and consistent. If they have to be woken at 7am for school then keep to this every day. Do not allow them to over sleep as this will affect their sleep later.
- In the morning get as much light exposure as possible to wake up their internal body clock – opening up blinds, lights on, eating breakfast, getting up and dressed, going outside.
- It is likely that their sleep pattern will get worse to begin with before you see the benefits. Be consistent and do not give up.

Unable to drift off to sleep...

If your teen goes to bed at that later time and is still lying there after 20/30mins then it may help for them to get up out of bed and do a relaxing activity before returning to bed.

E.g. go into the lounge to read a book before returning to bed when they are tired.

This can help offset the anxiety that they may feel about not being able to fall asleep in bed and the activity can distract them from overthinking.

If they continue to have anxiety and negative thoughts about going to sleep e.g. 'I'm not going to be able to sleep tonight, its going to be awful again' this will impact their ability to sleep.

Work on changing those negatives thoughts:

- "last night you did not sleep well, but you got through the day, and it was ok"
- "even if sleep isn't that good tonight you'll be ok"
- "even if you can't sleep, just having a rest in your bed is good for you"



Disruptive behaviour at bedtime

Bedtime can be a time when many children and adolescents start to become more disruptive and this could be because they have had their screens removed, are anxious about sleeping, or they are not ready to fall asleep.

It is important that the bedtime plan and rules are kept to consistently. By giving in to disruptive behaviour this teaches children that they can behave like this to get what they want. In the first days of implementing the bedtime rules it is likely that your child's sleep and behaviour will worsen before you start to see improvements.

Extinction:

This is where parents/carers ignore the inappropriate behaviours.

Parents do not respond to the child, unless there is a legitimate concern such as illness.

If the child gets up and comes out of the bedroom, parents/carers can calmly and gently lead them back to bed, reminding them of the expectations with minimal interaction.

Extinction burst:

This is when there is a burst of disruptive behaviour again after a period of improvement—this is very common.

Find out what the trigger is for this and try to address that with the child. Even if there is no trigger, continue to reinforce the extinction strategy and the child will usually return to their good sleep habits after a few nights.

Parents can complete a simple diary of their child's sleep patterns and this can be reviewed at follow-up with the School Nurse to see how the child is responding to the strategies.

Sleep diary

Give your child one 'pass' at bedtime that enables them to leave their room for one acceptable request (e.g. a drink or a toilet break). Once the pass is used, parents do not respond to further requests.

Bedtime pass:

Is your child or teenager being rebellious?
Talk to them about the value of sleep and how a good
night sleep will make them feel better, happier and
have more energy.

Find out what is going on for your teen? Why are they
being rebellious, why can't they sleep?

Do they have issues at school,
with friends, or family?

Are they still enjoying things?
Do they enjoy seeing friends
and doing activities?

Talk to them and listen to
what they have to say.



If your child is not enjoying things, not attending
school, not seeing friends and this goes on for
more than 2 weeks, then they could be going
through a period of low mood & may benefit from
speaking to a School Nurse or a counsellor.

Other helpful strategies for adolescents to try:

Muscle Relaxation:

Lie on your back and put your arms by your side. Relax your feet so they fall outwards.

Take three slow, deep breaths and notice how the air

moves in and out of your lungs.

Think about your toes and tense them while counting up to three. Then slowly release the tension from them.

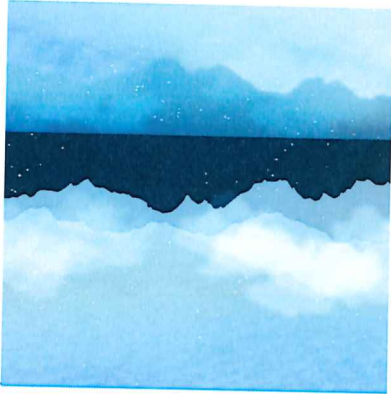
Now, working upwards from your toes, tense and release each part of your body in turn.

Keep your eyes gently closed.

Take one or two slow deep breaths when moving between different body parts.

Visualisation

Picture a scene or landscape that has pleasant memories for you, or that you imagine would be a calming or peaceful place to be.



Feel good statements:

Practice saying positive statements like 'Resting in bed is nice.' 'I feel calm.' Only use words that make you feel good, like - snug, nice, rest, pleasant, good, cosy, comfortable, safe.

Avoid any words about stress, worry, anxious, sadness, or fear just before bedtime.

If you find some unwelcome thoughts creeping in try to gently push them aside and replace them straight away with a 'positive' sentence.

Helpful websites:

www.what-18.nhs.uk/solent/camhs/sleep-help

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

Helpful apps:

Calm

Pizz

Sleepio

HeadSpace

Think Ninja

For more information,
advice or support contact
the Portsmouth School
Nursing Service on
0300123 6629

