



DID YOU KNOW that in Australia, approximately 70% of teenagers and 30% of primary school children experience sleep deprivation?

If you're a parent who is concerned that your child is not getting enough sleep, you're not alone. The good news is that there are some tips you can implement now to help develop smart sleep habits for your child.

Why is sleep deprivation such an issue?

Sleep deprivation has significant consequences in many areas of our children's lives such as:

Learning and academic performance

Sleep helps concentration and motivation along with consolidation and strengthening of new information and memories.

Emotional and mental health

Studies show children who are sleep deprived are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, negative body image and low self-esteem.

Behaviour and decision making

Sleep deprivation affects decision making capacity, has a negative effect on behaviour and relationships, and increases risk of accidents.

Body systems

Sleep deprivation affects children's physical growth, brain development, immune system and plays a key role in weight gain.

How much sleep do our children need?

Paediatric and Adolescent Sleep Physician, Dr Chris Seton, from the SleepShack says the best way to judge how much sleep a child needs is to assess whether it's "enough for them to wake spontaneously – meaning without an alarm clock - on most mornings and avoid tiredness during the day at least until the last hour before bedtime".

The National Sleep Foundation recommends:

- Preschoolers (3-5 years old): 10-13hrs
- Primary School Aged Children (6-12years old): 9-11 hrs
- Teens (13-17 years old): 8-10 hrs

Why are some children not getting the sleep they need?

The four main reasons children report that they are not getting enough sleep are:

1. Technology / FOMO
2. Homework / Study
3. Time management / Procrastination
4. Stress

The majority of child and adolescent sleep problems fall into four categories, though for many people a combination are at play.

<p>Insufficient sleep</p> <p>This is the most common sleep problem influenced by lack of understanding of the importance of sleep and hours required for optimal functioning. This combined with a busy lifestyles and the drive to be socially connected means sleep becomes undervalued and a low priority. Together this means children are simply not getting enough sleep for optimal physical and mental health.</p>	<p>Psychological Insomnia</p> <p>Is a common problem reported by adolescents. This includes difficulty initiating sleep, difficulty maintaining sleep, waking up too early and non-restorative sleep causing significant distress or impairment. The cause is often anxiety, depression or stress. Or it could be that they cannot switch off their brain from thinking and let go of the day.</p>
<p>Snoring and Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)</p> <p>Loud and regular nightly snoring is often abnormal in otherwise healthy children. Sometimes it is a sign of a respiratory infection, a stuffy nose or allergy. In more serious cases it can be a sign of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). This is caused by an obstruction of airflow when breathing, causing a lack of adequate oxygen supply to the brain. In children this is most commonly due to enlarged tonsils and adenoids but may also be influenced by factors including obesity and small airways.</p>	<p>Delayed sleep phase disorder (DSPS)</p> <p>Also known as “late body clock” or “night owl”. This can be generally defined when the teen’s sleep is delayed by more than 2 hrs of the desired time. They have difficulties getting to sleep, being more awake late at night and sleepy in the morning. This creates difficulties getting up at the appropriate time in the morning and they may describe feeling permanently jet-lagged. This body clock preference in adolescence is a mix of biological factors, further exacerbated by lack of parental monitoring, academic and social pressures and the use of electronic devices.</p>

What are the signs of sleep deprivation?

Physical

- Tired body language
- Less energy
- Yawning
- Headaches

Emotional

- Lower mood and motivation
- Stressed, depressed or anxious feelings

Habits

- Difficulty waking up
- Longer weekend sleep ins
- Late for school
- More use of caffeine/energy drinks

Brain

- Difficulties concentrating, poor short-term memory, declining grades
- Younger children can exhibit symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), becoming excitable, hyperactive, disagreeable and engaging in extreme behaviours like tantrums or aggression

Smart sleep habits - tips parents can implement now

Create a regular sleep/wake routine: Going to sleep and getting up around the same time every day helps keep your body clock in a regular rhythm making it easier to get to sleep and wake up. Try to maintain this schedule as closely as you can on weekends and holidays

Help your child to clear their mind by setting aside thinking and planning time prior to winding down

Ensure your child has a one hour break between study and sleep

Ensure your child has a one hour break between electronic devices and sleep

Make their bedroom an electronics free zone: Turn off all technological distractions before they go to bed and keep them out of their room

Keep their bedroom dark, quiet and the right temperature for sleeping

Expose them to bright light in the morning and dim light at night: The most important external signal for the biological clock is light. In the morning, sunlight signals the body to “wake up.” As the day progresses to evening the withdrawal of light lets us prepare for sleep by allowing for the release of chemicals like melatonin

Suggest that they keep pen and paper beside their bed to write down anything that pops up in their mind that may concern them and keep them awake if they don't write it down

Provide healthy food and drink

Encourage regular exercise, but not too close to bedtime: Exercise raises body temperature and cortisol levels making it difficult to go to sleep soon afterwards

Have a relaxing pre bed wind down routine: Don't get them to hop in wide awake and alert

Some extra trips for parents

Be a good role model: Examine your own sleep habits and your own electronic device use

Be aware of how much sleep your child needs and have a sleep time to aim for

Observe for tired signs and check in with your child's teacher regarding tired signs

Encourage the use of a 2-week sleep diary

Help your children with effective time management

Think about sleep issues as a potential cause of moodiness

Try putting yourself in your child's shoes: Remember what it was like to be a teenager

Sometimes sleep problems aren't about sleep: They can be a sign of an anxiety disorder or depression. Think about sleep in the broader context of your child's symptoms and history. If you suspect anxiety or depression see an expert for an assessment.



It's never too late

It's never too late to address sleep problems. If you have a child who is experiencing sleep deprivation, the earlier you seek help, the better it will be for your child.

Seek advice from a health professional if you're concerned that problems with sleep, however mild, are having an impact on your child's life in terms of wellbeing, school, relationships or home life.

Useful links

- sleepshack.com.au
- woolcock.org.au/paediatic-sleep-clinic
- thesleepconnection.com.au
- sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Thank you

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The
SLEEP
Connection

