

Sleep

Why is sleep important?

Sleep is a state of rest which keeps our brains and bodies working well. Sleep is important for growth, physical healing and some hormone regulation. It also plays a significant role in memory, learning and emotional regulation. Sleeping well, for the right amount of time, helps improve energy levels, mood, concentration, academic performance, and physical performance at games and sports.

There are three ways to think about the sleep we get:

1. How easily we fall asleep.
2. How long we sleep for (quantity).
3. How well we sleep (quality).

These can all be affected by lots of things, including bedroom environment, diet, smoking, drinking, mental health, exercise and mood. They also change naturally depending on our age.

Your body clock is the part of your brain that tells you when to go to sleep and when to wake up. During puberty, young people's body clocks shift later than an adult's body clock, which means they naturally feel more awake later at night. It also means they might struggle to wake up early for school or other early morning activities.

Most teenagers need around eight to 10 hours of sleep a night, but the range of 'normal' is between seven and 11 hours. If a young person is getting less than seven hours sleep most nights, they are probably not getting enough.

How to improve your child's sleep

Sleep is food for the brain and is a vital component to maintaining wellbeing. It is as important as the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. The NHS recommends that teenagers receive a minimum of eight to nine hours good sleep on school nights.

Tips to help your teenager with sleep include:

How much sleep they need

Take time to understand how much sleep they need (different people need different amounts) and when they need to wake up. From that work out a suitable bedtime.

Limit digital devices in the bedroom

If possible, don't have them in the bedroom at all. Light from the screen interferes with sleep and having screens in the bedroom also means your teenager is more likely to stay up late interacting with friends on social media. Turn down the brightness on any screens in the evening and encourage your teenager to have at least 30 minutes to an hour of screen-free time before going to sleep.

Exercise for better sleep

Regular exercise helps you sleep more soundly, as well as improving general and mental health. Encourage them to add some regular physical activity during the day, such as a walk, bike ride, sports club or home workout.

Get outdoors

Try to expose them to as much outdoor natural light as possible, especially first thing in the morning.

Reduce or cut out caffeine

Encourage your teenager to avoid caffeinated or sugary drinks, especially after lunch. Caffeine can be found in drinks such as cola, tea and coffee.

Have a good routine

Encourage your teenager to keep a regular, calm bedtime routine that you agree together. Doing the same things in the same order an hour or so before bed can help them drift off to sleep. This might involve reading, skincare, stretching or breathing exercises or listening to music.

Limit the time spent lying in bed not sleeping. This might mean having a later bedtime if it helps to fall asleep quicker. If a young person does other activities in bed, such as schoolwork or gaming, encourage them to create different 'zones' in their room, if possible.

Eating before bedtime

We know that eating too much, or too little, close to bedtime can lead to an overfull or empty stomach. This can be a cause of discomfort during the night and may prevent sleep. Discuss this with your teenager and agree what bedtime snacks will fit into their routine and help them get a good night of sleep.

Create a sleep-friendly bedroom

Ensure your teenager has a good sleeping environment, even if sharing a room with siblings. Ideally a room that is dark, cool, quiet and comfortable.

Share time to talk through any problems or worries

This will help them to put their problems into perspective and sleep better. Encouraging them to jot down their worries or make a to-do list before they go to bed should mean they're less likely to lie awake worrying during the night.

Minimise long weekend lie-ins

Encourage your teen to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. Late nights and long lie-ins can disrupt their body clock and leave them with weekend "jet lag" on Monday mornings.

What are the impacts?

If a young person is consistently not getting enough sleep, they might lack energy and motivation throughout the day, feel irritable, low, or overwhelmed, have mood

swings, and struggle to concentrate, remember things, or make decisions. This could affect their relationships, risk-taking behaviour, physical and mental health and how they do at school.

Aside from not getting enough sleep, other sleep problems in adolescence are common and can take many forms, including insomnia, nightmares or sleep terrors, sleepwalking and bedwetting. These problems can often be temporary if sleep behaviours or habits are changed, but it is important to seek help as soon as possible if sleeping issues persist or are causing distress to young people and their families.

How to talk to young people about their sleep

- Understand why a young person might be struggling to sleep. It may be a natural result of their body clock changing, or an underlying reason like worry or anxiety.
- Discuss bedtimes together and help them recognise the benefits of sleep rather than arguing or telling them off.
- Role model positive sleep behaviours, such as a bedtime routine and limiting screen time.
- Ask how you can help improve their sleep. This might involve helping them rearrange their room or cut down on activities and commitments, especially early in the morning.
- Talk about how their sleep pattern may be affected by other family members. This may include sharing a bedroom with a sibling or family members working shift patterns and discuss how the impact may be reduced.
- Talk about whether there is any underlying physical reason they might be struggling to sleep that might require more support, such as period pain, toothache, headaches or incontinence.
- Be consistent. Small changes, for example going to bed 15 minutes earlier, can add up over time.

Where can I get local advice and support?

ChatHealth - is a way to text a school nurse to find out about local services and get confidential help and support. Text: 07507 332160. The service is available Monday to Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm (excluding bank holidays). If you live on the Isle of

Wight, or would rather speak to someone face-to-face, you can ask your school or college about their nursing service.

Hampshire CAMHS - has an online guide with advice and tips to sleep better, as well as links to self-help guides and apps: [Click here](#).

Health for Teens - has a section on their website about sleep, including videos, podcasts, and tips on how to retrain your brain to sleep: [Click here](#).

Kooth - If a young person is struggling to sleep due to their mental wellbeing, such as anxiety or depression, or lack of sleep is affecting their mental wellbeing they can sign up to Kooth for free online counselling and emotional wellbeing support from qualified counsellors. No referral is required.
[Click here.](#)

If you have concerns about sleep problems, you can also speak to your GP.

Where can I get more advice from national resources?

<i>Link and /or QR code</i>	<i>Description</i>
Teens & Young People - Teen Sleep Hub	Teen Sleep Hub is a website with information about sleep and how to improve it, tips and videos on screen time, routines and making enough time to sleep. They also have a national sleep helpline on 03303 530541.
Sleep Problems Signs of Sleep Problems	Young Minds has an online guide to sleep problems in young people, including nightmares, anxiety and wetting the bed.
Sleeping - The Mix	The Mix provides support for under 25-year-olds and has a whole section of expert advice on sleep.
Information and advice - ERIC	ERIC is a website for children and teenagers struggling with bowel or bladder problems like bedwetting. It includes information and advice on where to get help and stories from other young people.