

# Getting enough sleep

## Research reveals important health links to teens' sleep

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Getting back into the routine of waking up early is tough for everyone but particularly for teens, whose bodies are wired for late nights and who face the social pressures of after-hours texting and social networking.

Research is now clear that sleep is important in myriad ways. Lack of sleep combined with genetic vulnerabilities can lead to heart disease, depression, a weakened immune system and obesity-related diabetes, said Mary Carskadon, a professor of psychiatry at Brown University and director of Chronobiology and Sleep Research at E.P. Bradley Hospital in Providence.

A good night's sleep is also crucial for learning. "It helps you to prepare to learn, and also to benefit from what you've learned in the day," Carskadon said. "It's the glue that keeps that information and sharpens it in your brain." But kids, particularly teens, still get too little sleep. With the hormonal changes of adolescence, body clocks shift later. The average teen can't fall asleep until 11 p.m. or midnight — and when they need to wake up at 6 or 7 a.m., there's no way they can get the sleep they need, Carskadon and others say.

Younger children generally don't have as much trouble adjusting; they haven't shifted as much during the summer, they still have enforceable bedtimes, they're generally less addicted to social media, and elementary schools often start at 8 or 9 a.m., later than many high schools.

Susan Rausch, like many sleep experts, said it's a terrible idea to start school so early in the morning because it's so counter to what teens need biologically. "If we're teaching to a test, I'm not sure why we're not teaching to the biology," said Rausch, medical director of the Sleep Center at Memorial, a lab and sleep clinic in Yakima, Wash.

Not all sleep problems are out of kids' control, however. Late-night texting, TV time and computer use also cut down on the quality and quantity of sleep. Rausch and others recommend turning off electronics at least 30 minutes before bedtime to decompress and removing the bright lights that can suppress levels of the hormone melatonin and make it harder to fall asleep. And that catch-up sleep on weekends can make people sleepier, said Richard Seligman, medical director for Presbyterian Sleep Disorders Center in Albuquerque. The first night of extra sleep can help compensate for too-short nights during the week. But a second or third will throw off body clocks and make the next few days miserable, he said.

