

Are you getting enough sleep?

Adolescents need 9-10 hours of sleep each night.

Take sleep seriously- you need it to live!

It's true; lab rats that were deprived sleep died just as quickly as the rats who didn't get food!

EVERY NIGHT, Sawyer G. goes to bed and stays awake for hours before falling asleep. Some nights, she doesn't sleep at all. Other times, she'll fall asleep only to wake up at the lightest sound.

"By the time I get to school, I usually fall asleep by my second class. I feel really tired and cranky," says Sawyer, a 13-year-old from Waukesha, Wis.

Although her sleeping habits are far from normal, studies show that most teens today are sleep deprived. Like a computer with a low battery, a sleep-deprived person will feel sluggish. He or she also will be less alert, have difficulty concentrating on tasks such as schoolwork and lessons, and be more likely to experience mood swings.

The results can be dangerous. The National Sleep Foundation has found teens are, as a group, at high risk for problems due to sleepiness, the worst of them being injuries and death caused by drowsy driving. Sleep deficiency in teens is often thought to be from an unwillingness to go to bed early, but its causes can be a lot more serious.

Be Alert for Sleep Disorders

There are many types of sleep disorders, but all have one thing in common: They disrupt a person's normal sleeping patterns. Conditions such as acid reflux, in which stomach acids back up into the esophagus, causing a burning sensation in the chest; sleep apnea, in which the airways to the lungs are blocked as you sleep; and restless legs syndrome, characterized by an uncontrollable urge to move your limbs, can repeatedly interrupt your sleep cycle.

Your lifestyle and environment can also affect sleep in less obvious but equally important ways. Drug and alcohol use has been found to contribute to sleep problems, as have stress, anxiety, and depression. In Sawyer's case, she noticed her difficulties falling asleep started around the same time that she was going

through a rough patch after her parents' divorce. She decided to see a school counselor and has even started meditating to help her deal with stress.

If you're having problems sleeping but aren't sure whether you have a sleep disorder, consider what effects the lack of rest is having on your life. Sleep problems are considered disorders when lack of sleep begins to interfere with daytime activities, such as focusing on schoolwork, remembering things, and driving, according to Dr. Philip Alapat. If that sounds like what you are going through, talk to your doctor about your concerns—he or she may be able to point you in the direction of a sleep specialist or clinic.

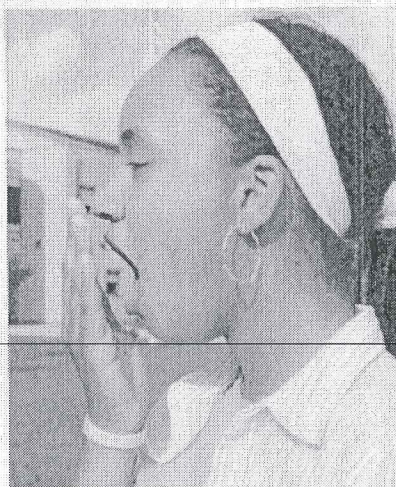
Most teenagers won't need to take pills or spend a night at a sleep clinic, however. "Most teenagers usually need a little more education of what should be expected and what are reasonable times of sleep," says Alapat, who is medical director of the Baylor College of Medicine Sleep Center in Houston.

Breathe Better, Sleep Better

Treatments for sleep disorders vary depending on the nature of the condition. One of the most common sleep disorders is sleep apnea, which causes people to snore and wake up several times throughout the night. If you wake up in the morning feeling tired, but you think you slept all night, ask your parents or siblings whether you've been snoring. Your body weight may even be a factor, says Alapat. Teens who are obese are more likely to develop sleep apnea.

Although some cases of sleep apnea can be treated by losing weight through diet and exercise, most patients use a CPAP (pronounced SEE-pap) machine. CPAP is short for continuous positive airway pressure. The device includes a mask that the patient

wears over the nose and mouth while sleeping. It prevents sleep apnea by blowing air at just the right pressure to keep the airways open.



The National Sleep Foundation says only 15 percent of teens get the recommended amount of sleep on school nights.

Most teens are hesitant to use the CPAP machine at first, notes Dr. Yemiserach Kifle, codirector of the Pediatric Sleep Medicine Program at Seattle Children's Hospital. They're embarrassed or afraid it will be uncomfortable. But each mask is fitted and customized, and for many teens, getting quality sleep and feeling better during the day is worth it. Plus, you can take a break from the mask on weekends, she says, such as in the case of a sleeper with friends.

Delayed Sleep Means Delayed Reactions

When she was in seventh grade, Anita R. of Pearland, Texas, was having trouble sleeping and concentrating in class. She began researching the importance of getting enough shut-eye for her science fair project and realized she had something called delayed sleep phase syndrome (DSPS).

People with DSPS have a hard time falling asleep, even when going to bed at a normal hour, and they feel the urge to sleep in. "I'd go to first period and

I'd fall asleep in the middle of class, and I'd wake up with no recollection of what had gone on in the class," says Anita, now 15. "I'd have to come home and relearn everything that I'd missed in class, and I'd stay up doing that and talking with friends."

It's important to break the cycle of DSPS by practicing good sleep habits. Alapat recommends avoiding large meals, caffeine, and exercise three hours before bedtime, and keeping a consistent sleep schedule throughout the week. Make sure that the only activity you do in bed is sleep—studies have shown that electronic devices in the bedroom, such as computers, video games, and cell phones, are related to poor-quality sleep.

"The problem with that is your body gets used to doing other things rather than just sleeping in your bed," Anita says. After learning how sleep deprivation was affecting her moods and ability to focus, she started Project SIESTA, an outreach program that educates teens on how to get better sleep.

"You just feel better when you get a good night's rest," Anita comments. "Everything seems to look brighter to you."

Tips for Getting Better (And More) Sleep

- 1 Try not to eat, drink caffeine, or exercise three hours before your bedtime.
- 2 Avoid video games, surfing the Internet, and texting with friends late in the evening. Those activities can keep you up late and make it hard to fall asleep.
- 3 Keep a sleep diary. Take notes on when you fall asleep each night and what time you wake up.
- 4 Avoid daytime naps. They can disrupt your sleep routine. If you have to take a nap during the day, limit it to 15 to 30 minutes.
- 5 Come up with a relaxation routine, such as taking a warm bath or listening to soothing music, that will help your body wind down close to bedtime.

Wake Up Brighter and More Alert

Getting enough sleep does more than improve your mood; it also can keep you and others safe while driving. According to Kifle, about 68 percent of high school seniors have reported driving at least once while drowsy, and 50 percent have reported driving drowsy at least once a week. Driving drowsy can have the same deadly effects as driving under the influence, making it just as dangerous.

To be well rested and alert throughout the day, make sure that your bedtime is consistent every evening. It's hard for the body to make up for lost sleep. "We have an internal clock in our body that wants to be regularly scheduled," says Kifle. And if it's not? "It's almost like a jet lag, like flying from coast to coast, and it's not easy to catch up." CH

Think About It

What influences in your life may be keeping you from getting all the sleep you need? Can you make any changes to improve your amount of sleep daily?