

Sleep Better Guide for Teens



empirically-supported tips to help teens sleep

1. What to expect.

Most teens naturally undergo a shift in their sleep called a circadian shift. Their brain clock tells them to go to sleep later and wake up later. Most teens shift forward by two hours and wake up two hours later. That means teens naturally want to go to bed later and wake up later than when they were children.

2. Keep a consistent sleep schedule — even on the weekends!

Going to bed and waking up at different times confuses the body's internal clock and puts us through jet lag. Going to bed 3 hours later on weekends, then waking up early for school on Monday is equivalent to traveling from Los Angeles to New York City and back again! Keep a consistent schedule every day of the week (especially on weekends). This will make falling asleep quicker and easier, and make mornings easier.

3. Keep technology out of the bedroom.

Research shows that devices such as phones or tablets are the biggest culprits for causing sleep problems in children and teens! Keep technology devices, including TVs, phones, tablets, laptops and video games out of your teen's bedroom. If teens need TV noise to fall asleep to, try to replace that with a white noise generator.

4. Cut caffeine after lunch.

More than ever before, teenagers use caffeine and prescription stimulants to mask their chronic sleep deprivation. Caffeine is a stimulant that makes the body feel aroused and awake. Caffeine can stay in the body's system for up to 8 hours, so teens should avoid caffeine after lunchtime. Caffeine can be found in many types of soda, coffee, iced tea and chocolate.

5. Schedule 8.5–9.5 hours for sleep.

Sleep is essential to teen's bone and muscle growth, brain development, emotion regulation and more. Many cognitive processes are dependent on adequate sleep opportunity. Pediatricians and Sleep Physician recommend that teens ages 13-21 years old obtain between 8.5-9.5 hours of sleep every night.

6. Avoid screen time 1 hour before bed.

Using technology before bed tricks our bodies into feeling activated, and the light from TVs, phones, laptops and tablets can actually suppress the hormone in our body (melatonin) that makes us feel sleepy. Teens should avoid watching TV, playing video games, working on the computer or playing on their phone 1 hour before bed.

7. Follow a consistent bedtime routine.

Having a 20- to 30-minute bedtime routine every night can help dramatically with falling asleep. The routine should include calm activities that occur in relatively low lighting, such as reading a book, taking a shower, brushing teeth, getting lunch or clothes ready for the next day. This routine should not involve using technology or engaging in screen time. Completing the same bedtime routine every night trains your body that it is time to sleep once you complete the routine.

8. Keep a comfortable bedroom and only use the bed for sleep.

The bedroom should be comfortable, quiet and dark. Teens will sleep better in a room that is cool (less than 75° F). Your teen should use ear plugs if they wake up frequently from noises and put curtains up if there is excess light. Most importantly, teens should not do anything in bed other than sleep. When teens read, play on their phone or does homework in their bed, it trains their body to associate the bed with being awake.

9. If your teen can't sleep — they should get out of bed!

Lying in bed awake trains the body to associate the bed with being awake. If your teen cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, he should quietly leave the bed and do a calm, quiet activity until he feels tired again. This activity should be in low light and should NOT involve using technology, like watching movies, browsing the internet or using a phone or tablet. An ideal activity would be calming or boring, such as meditating on the couch in low light.

