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### Is your teen getting enough sleep?

Adolescents, like infants and toddlers, have developmental issues with sleep.

At first glance, the sleepy adolescent seems to be a boring topic unworthy of much discussion. But information in an American Academy of Pediatrics Technical report published in the June issue of *Pediatrics* points out profound public health issues warranting debate.

Sleepiness impacts school performance, is a leading cause of auto accidents and has a negative impact on behavior and mood. Although problems like ADHD and depression must be considered in any evaluation of excessive drowsiness, the most common cause is too little time in bed.

There is strong evidence that early-morning high school start times have a strong correlation with daytime fatigue, attendance and academic performance.

Studies from around the world confirm what American parents already know: Teens, like their younger siblings, require eight to 10 hours of sleep per night.

But teens are busy people. By the time they socialize, take part in extracurricular activities, work, and do their homework, it's bedtime. And it's late.

Since they must get up early for school, teens end up with sleep deficits. Sleepiness that catches up with teens in school results in short naps, poor attention in class and diminished performance. On the weekends, teens try to catch up on sleep by staying in bed later, but they usually go to bed much later on weekends, thus increasing the deficit.

Since similar patterns exist in all cultures around the globe, it appears that developing adolescents do have biological clocks that are unique to them.

Those clocks, combined with rising early, cause poor performance in many kids who might otherwise be academically successful.

A number of school systems have acknowledged this difference by beginning high school an hour later. Research in these communities reveals students take advantage of the time and actually sleep more, attendance increases and school dropouts decline. Students with better grades consistently report getting more sleep than do the students who don't do as well.

Of course, daytime drowsiness may be related to something other than spending too little time in bed. Drowsiness may be a sign of depression, or a cause of depression. The same complex relationship exists with ADHD. At times, sleep deficits can reduce focus, limit attention to task and increase hyperactivity. At other times, drowsiness is a symptom of ADHD, the inability to sleep either clinically related or a side effect of the long-acting medications often prescribed to treat ADHD.

Sleep is an important issue requiring parental attention, and if the studies cited are correct, public attention. If you think this is an issue that requires attention in your house, contact your pediatrician.

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