

# Sleep zzz

## Why it's important and how to make sure your child gets enough

**Sleep is an essential element for optimum health, so make sure your child is getting enough rest. Teenagers need a lot of sleep given the huge changes taking place in their bodies – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night. Tempting though it may be for them to study late into the night, they will be much better off putting work aside and getting into bed.**

Of course, this can be easier said than done. Many teenagers view bedtime as a punishment rather than a reward – it's eating into time they'd rather spend doing something else. So it's important that you help them understand the benefits of getting a good night's sleep: such as better concentration so they can get things done quicker; feeling more alert so they can take in information more effectively, and having more energy to get the most out of their day. For bedtime, they should work backwards! If they have to get up at 7.00 am, then they need to be asleep by 11.00 pm – which probably means being in bed much earlier – after all, not many of us fall asleep as soon as we get into bed.

Be firm about bedtime when they're in their mid-teens. At this stage you can insist they go to bed at the right time which should encourage them to stick to a similar routine when they reach their late teens when it's not so easy for you to tell them what to do.

### Mobiles, screens and sleep

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by ready access to a 24/7 online community via their phones such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, WhatsApp and other messaging services, not to mention their compulsion to play games and catch up with box sets late into the night.

To combat this you may want to minimise the number of screens they have in the bedroom, encourage them to have at least 30 mins screen-free time before settling down to sleep and get them to use night screen settings in the evening to reduce glare (white light on bright screens prevent sleepiness). Phones should be set to silent at bedtime so that sleep is not interrupted by regular pinging with alerts and messages.

### Other ways to minimise phone time

Create rules for the whole family - such as no phones at the table during mealtimes, no phones before school, no phones after 9:00 pm. If you do this, it's important you're consistent (don't set a bad example by ignoring the rule if it doesn't suit you). Establish rewards for appropriate phone use and penalties for inappropriate use.

Importantly, have conversations with your teen about using mobiles sensibly, and

have the conversations at times when neither of you are tired nor emotional. This will avoid heated discussions or rows and you're much more likely to reach a compromise that suits you both.

### A bedtime routine

Creating a "bedtime" routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away 30 minutes before bed, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep.



Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off so try to get your child into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time (especially on week nights).

Encourage them to keep a notebook where any worries or important things to do the next day can be jotted down. This prevents the mind turning over once the lights go out and fretting about forgetting things thus preventing sleep.

If they share a room, curtaining off their sleeping area helps give them some personal space.

### Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend to just an extra hour or so in bed. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings.

Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to

a regular cycle. Make plans for weekend mornings so they have a reason to get up if there aren't activities they can do through school or if they aren't inclined to organise anything themselves.

### Walk your talk!

Are you, as their parent, setting a good example? It might be harder for them to get into good sleep patterns if you are not following the advice you give them.

### Useful links

NHS  
Live Well  
Guide

Sleep  
Council  
UK

## STICKING TO A SIMILAR ROUTINE EVERY NIGHT SIGNALS TO THE BODY IT'S TIME FOR BED



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