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School is Almost Out! Should Sleep Patterns Change During Summer Vacation?



The effects of inadequate sleep is well documented. In children, signs of insufficient sleep include difficulty waking in the morning, irritability late in the day, falling asleep during quiet times in the day and falling asleep while at school. Signs of inadequate sleep may also include sleeping for extra long periods on the weekends. Summer may be a great time to catch up on some needed sleep for most school aged kids.

It is very important that school aged kids and teens maintain an adequate sleep time and sleep pattern even while on summer vacation. The recommended hours of sleep are 10 to 11 hours for school aged children and 9 for adolescents¹. Well rested kids and teens have increased mental and physical alertness and awareness when performing various tasks. They should try to keep or maintain the recommended sleeping times during the night as much as possible while on vacation. Some sleep experts suggest perhaps maintaining the recommended hours but slight changes in the sleep times. For example, if a child sleeps 10 hours a night, from 9 AM to 7 AM during regular school nights, it is recommended that they maintain 10 hours duration during vacation with a change in times from 11PM to 9 AM or 12 AM to 10 AM. They also suggest that approximately two weeks before the school vacation ends, kids and teens begin transitioning back to their regular sleep pattern by going to bed 15 to 30 minutes earlier and waking 15 to 30 minutes earlier while still the full recommended hours of sleep. Hopefully resuming normal sleep pattern within 2 weeks.

What Are The Consequences of Not Getting Enough Sleep?

There are several medical health conditions that can result in children who are continuously sleep deprived. These conditions include: Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and depression to name a few. Good sleep is related to good nutrition. Sleep regulates hormones in the body that relate to signals of hunger and satiety. The two major hormones are ghrelin and leptin. When an adult or child does not get enough sleep the levels of ghrelin, produced by the stomach, sends signals to the brain that make one feel hungry. Leptin on the other hand tells us that we are not hungry anymore, and is reduced when one is sleep deprived. According to a study conducted by Shahradsad and colleague found that increased BMI was proportional to decreased sleep. Overeating is common in children and adults that are sleep deprived due to the hormone ghrelin telling the brain that they are still hungry.³

To help combat excessive weight gain during the summer break it is important to encourage children to be physically active for at least 1 hour every day. There are multiple organized summer activities in the community to get your child or teen involved in. Here are resource links [for elementary and middle schoolers](#) and [for high school students](#).

7 Back to School Sleep Tips:

1. Have your child **practice** going to bed earlier 1-2 weeks before classes start
2. Maintain a sleep schedule. It is recommended to enforce bedtimes for your child even during the summer months. Sleep deprivation from the summer can carry over into the school year.
3. Establish *relaxation time* around bedtime. Examples include: lower lighting throughout the home, quiet time, encourage your child to unwind nearing bedtime by reading a book, or taking a bath/shower.
4. Limit television and electronics before bedtime. Set a house rule that everyone has to abide by.
5. Limit big meals before bedtime, especially high fat, high carb foods.
6. Say “No” to caffeine for a child.
7. Be a good role model for your child. You should have a bedtime too!

References:

1. How much sleep baby and kids need: <https://sleepfoundation.org>
2. Franckle R, Adler R, Davison K. Accelerated weight gain among children during summer versus school year and related racial/ethnic disparities: a systematic review. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2014 Jun 12;11:E101. doi: 10.5888/pcd11.130355.
3. Taheri S, Lin L, Austin D, Young T, Mignot E. Short Sleep Duration Is Associated with Reduced Leptin, Elevated Ghrelin, and Increased Body Mass Index. *Froguel P, ed. PLoS Medicine.* 2004;1(3):e62. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0010062.

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