Sleepy Teenagers

Scientific research shows that teenagers are sleepier than younger children or older adults. Teenagers' sleep is shallower and does not refresh them as well as the sleep that younger children get. When allowed to sleep as much as they would like, teenagers average 9 to 10 hours per night, but few of them manage as much as this. Indeed, high school students often have to wake up as early as 6.30am to arrive at school on time. In order to get even nine hours of sleep with such a schedule, it would be necessary to go to bed at around 9.30pm, which is not likely.

Teenagers usually oversleep at weekends and during holidays. Teenagers also tend to have much more irregular sleep schedules. The times when they go to bed and wake up on weekdays are very different from the times at weekends. This constant changing of the number of hours spent sleeping can lead to a significant disruption of the sleep pattern.

It is estimated that up to 40% of high school and college students are short of sleep. This figure may be an underestimate. There are many reasons for the lack of sleep. It is at this age that academic work increases. Young people engage in many more social activities such as sports and school clubs. In addition to doing their homework, they may also have to work long hours to earn money for college. Many college students have to be full-time students and full-time workers due to financial difficulties. When young people are getting insufficient sleep, the motivation that is needed to do well in the classroom can be affected. Indeed students with below average grades typically report getting less sleep than students with better grades.

The adolescent years are filled with challenges. Teenagers take on more adult roles yet in many ways they still have the same needs they had when they were children. They experience the rapid physical and emotional changes of becoming young adults; they want independence and the freedom to come and go whenever they please but in reality they are still dependent on their parents. While living at home, they are still required to obey the rules of the house. Many have concerns about their future such as going to college, getting a job and having enough money to buy the latest clothes and mobile phones to impress their friends. All of these worries and concerns can interfere with their sleep.

Sleep is often a lower priority for adolescents. This is especially true during the school week when school, homework, sports, after-school activities, volunteer work, jobs and socialising seem much more important than sleep. Not many teenagers can appreciate that the brain works better with the right amount of sleep. If they did, then they might realise that the extra sleep was worth it.

There are a number of concerns related to insufficient sleep that go beyond the effects it has on the memory and the way in which the brain works. Over-tiredness results in a higher risk of accidents, especially motor vehicle accidents. Laboratory studies have shown that significant sleep loss results in careless driving – not a good thing for teenage drivers just learning the rules of the road.