**Teen sleep cycles affect school success: Habits that help**

*Late bedtimes and difficulty waking are linked to changes in brain chemistry during adolescence. Understanding teen sleep requirements can help improve school performance.*

(Posted on **September 25, 2013** by [**Carolyn Penniman**](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/experts/carolyn_jean_penniman), Michigan State University Extension)

As middle and high school students adjust to school schedules, many find it challenging to keep up with studies and activities and still get the sleep they need.

Two changes affect sleep patterns at puberty. The brain changes the way sleep is regulated, with increased hormones that shift sleep timing to later at night and also sleeping later in the morning. Another change is the need for more sleep – teens need 8.5–9.5 hours of sleep each night.

[Scientific studies](http://www.sleepforscience.org/research/publications.php) by over sixty experts in the field of sleep health have researched this topic for almost 20 years and confirmed these findings. A prominent expert on adolescent sleep, Dr. Mary Carskadon, director of the Chronobiology/Sleep Research Laboratory at Bradley Hospital in East Providence, R.I. and professor at the Brown University School of Medicine, notes that teens who get the sleep they need have less likelihood of depressed moods, reduced lateness to school, reduced absenteeism and better grades in school. She maintains that children and adolescents experience better learning and academic success and greater physical and mental health when their sleep is protected and supported to [levels recommended by a consensus of experts.](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep) **Sleep is a very productive time for the developing brain. During sleep the brain is organizing and consolidating the day’s learning.**

Carskadon acknowledges that there is some individual variability in sleep needs – therefore these recommendations are offered as guidelines. She encourages parents to watch for potential signs of insufficient sleep in children and teens, such as difficulty waking in the morning, daytime sleepiness and sleeping longer on weekends and school vacations.

Sleep experts say dimming the lights at night and getting lots of daylight in the morning can help. Avoiding caffeine, especially in the evening, having a routine bedtime of 10 p.m., sleeping in a cool environment and turning off music and other electronic devices will also help to reset the body clock. Allow time to catch up on sleep during the weekend, but avoid “binge-sleeping.” If a student is used to getting up at 6:30 a.m., they shouldn’t sleep until noon on the weekend, which confuses their bodies. Parents can support their teens by understanding their sleep needs and helping them adjust their sleep habits.