The importance of sleep

Sleep is essential for the healthy development of young people and is just as important as good nutrition and regular physical activity. During childhood and adolescence, the body and brain undergo significant growth and development, making adequate sleep crucial for physical health, cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and academic success. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that children aged 6 to 12 years receive 9 to 12 hours of sleep per night, while teenagers aged 13 to 18 years should get 8 to 10 hours for optimal health.



Physical Health and Growth

One of the most important functions of sleep is supporting physical growth and development. During deep stages of sleep, the body releases hormones that stimulate growth, repair tissues, build muscle, and strengthen bones. Sleep also supports the immune system, helping young people resist infections and recover more quickly from illness and injury.

In addition, sleep helps regulate hormones responsible for appetite and metabolism. Research shows that insufficient sleep is associated with an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and other health problems in children and adolescents. Young people who do not get enough sleep are also more likely to make unhealthy food choices and experience weight gain.



Cognitive Development and Academic Achievement

Sleep plays a vital role in brain development and learning. During sleep, the brain processes information gathered throughout the day, consolidates memories, and strengthens learning. Adequate sleep improves attention, concentration, problem-solving skills, creativity, and analytical thinking.

Young people who get enough sleep generally perform better at school because they can focus more effectively in lessons and retain information more successfully. In contrast, sleep deprivation can result in poor concentration, reduced memory, lower academic performance, and difficulties with learning.



Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

Sleep is strongly linked to mental and emotional health. Getting sufficient sleep helps young people regulate their emotions, cope with stress, and maintain a positive mood. During adolescence, emotional development is particularly important, and sleep supports the brain processes involved in emotional regulation.

A lack of sleep can lead to irritability, mood swings, increased stress levels, anxiety, and symptoms of depression. Research has shown that young people who experience ongoing sleep deprivation are at greater risk of developing mental health difficulties and experiencing a reduced quality of life.

Behaviour and Decision-Making

Adequate sleep also influences behaviour and decision-making. Sleep deprivation can affect judgement, self-control, and impulse regulation, which may lead to behavioural difficulties both at home and in school. Children and teenagers who do not get enough sleep may struggle to pay attention, become more impulsive, and experience difficulties managing their behaviour.

For older teenagers, poor sleep can increase the risk of accidents and injuries, including road traffic accidents caused by reduced concentration and slower reaction times. Sufficient sleep is therefore important not only for personal health but also for safety.

Why Teenagers Often Struggle to Get Enough Sleep

Many teenagers find it difficult to obtain the recommended amount of sleep due to both biological and environmental factors. During puberty, changes occur in the body's circadian rhythm, causing teenagers to naturally feel tired later in the evening and want to wake up later in the morning. This change often conflicts with school schedules, homework, extracurricular activities, social commitments, and screen use.

The widespread use of phones, tablets, computers, and televisions before bedtime can further disrupt sleep because the blue light emitted by screens interferes with the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle.



Promoting Healthy Sleep Habits

Developing healthy sleep habits can significantly improve both the quantity and quality of sleep. Experts recommend maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, creating a relaxing bedtime routine, limiting screen use before bed, avoiding caffeine in the evening, and ensuring that the bedroom is dark, quiet, and comfortable. Regular physical activity and effective stress management can also contribute to better sleep.

By establishing these habits early, young people can improve their physical health, emotional well-being, and academic performance while reducing the risks associated with sleep deprivation.

Sleep is a fundamental requirement for healthy growth, development, and well-being in young people. It supports physical growth, strengthens the immune system, enhances learning and memory, improves emotional regulation, and promotes safer decision-making. Despite its importance, many children and adolescents do not receive the recommended amount of sleep. Encouraging healthy sleep routines and prioritising adequate rest can have significant benefits for young people's health, educational achievement, and overall quality of life.