

school daze

LACK OF SLEEP CAN LEAD TO EVERYTHING FROM BAD GRADES AND POOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE TO IRRITABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. LEARN HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS GET THE ZZZ'S THEY NEED. **BY KIM ACOSTA**

It's just past noon and 17-year-old Dallas Caudell, of Queen Creek, Arizona, is on his second energy drink, struggling to stay awake in math class. He admits to playing videogames or watching TV until the wee hours. His mom tells him to hit the sheets earlier, but with a computer and TV just feet from his bed, she finds it tough to enforce an earlier bedtime.

If you don't think Dallas sounds like your kid, think again. Just one in five teens get the ideal nine hours of shut-eye per night, according to a National Sleep Foundation (NSF) poll. "Lack of sleep affects every aspect of kids' lives," says Jodi Mindell, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, and coauthor of *Take Charge of Your Child's Sleep* (Marlowe &



Most teens don't get the nine hours of sleep that experts recommend.

Company). “Studies show that tired teens are more likely to nod off in class, miss school, get poor grades, drive while drowsy and feel depressed.” Fortunately, you can reform your teen night owl.

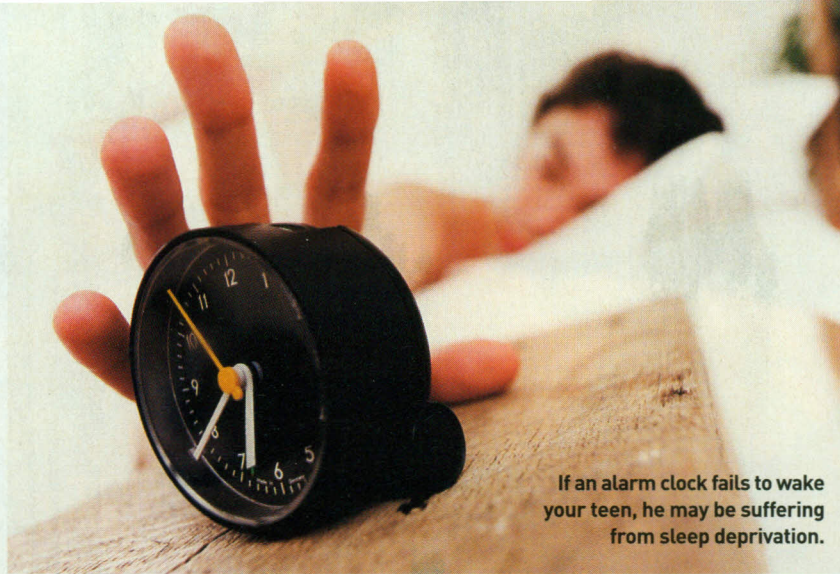
SLEEP STEALER

beverage buzz

What’s keeping your child up nights may have something to do with the amount of caffeine she’s downing. While coffee drinks are an obvious source—the largest Starbucks coffee has 259 milligrams of caffeine—soft drinks remain the culprit of choice among teens. In a study of 15,000 students, over two-thirds drink soda at least once a day. About 70 percent of soft drinks contain caffeine—with an average of 45 mg per 12 ounces. “Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, increasing the heart rate and making you more alert,” says Cynthia Sass, R.D., a Tampa, Florida-based spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

But java and soda aren’t the only drinks shortchanging your kids’ slumber. In addition to caffeine, many energy and sports drinks contain plant-based stimulants such as guarana, ginseng and green tea extract. These too can keep the body revved up for hours, says Sass. **Put it to rest** If your teen is opposed to good old H₂O, keep flavored seltzer, juice and lemonade on hand, as well as herbal iced teas and, if necessary, caffeine-free versions of your child’s favorite sodas, suggests Mindell. “Read labels or go online to sleuth out exactly what’s in your kids’ drinks,” she says. A good place to start is mayoclinic.com/health/caffeine/AN01211, which lists caffeine amounts of many beverages.

Can’t talk your child out of drinking soda? Allow just one can a day—but not after 2 P.M. since half of all caffeine consumed remains in the body for about six hours. A balanced evening meal of carbs, lean protein, healthy fat and water will also make it easier for your child to nod off at a reasonable hour, says Sass.



If an alarm clock fails to wake your teen, he may be suffering from sleep deprivation.

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high-tech toys

About 97 percent of teens have at least one technological device—such as a cell phone, computer, TV or MP3 player—in their bedroom, according to the NSF. And those who have four or more in their room (nearly 40 percent of teens) get 30 minutes less sleep every night and are almost twice as likely to snooze in school than those who don’t. “Teens are naturally more alert at night than they are at other times of the day, and adding the extra stimulus of electronics makes it that much harder to settle down,” says Mary Carskadon, Ph.D., a professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown Medical School.

Put it to rest Remove TVs and computers from your kids’ bedrooms, or at least set limits on their usage. If the computer must stay, consider purchasing software that disables Internet access at a certain time each night. For other gadgets like MP3 players and cell phones, designate a spot in the kitchen where everyone can put them at bedtime. This way it’s viewed as a strategy for making sure the entire family gets uninterrupted sleep rather than just as a punishment for your teen, says Mindell.

SLEEP STEALER

hormonal shifts

When your teen is lethargic all day and comes alive after sunset, biology may be to blame. Once puberty hits, adolescents

experience a delayed sleep-wake cycle, meaning the brain produces the sleep hormone melatonin later at night than it does in younger children and adults. At the same time, the ability to withstand the pressure of sleep deprivation strengthens. **Put it to rest** Melatonin production is triggered by darkness, so keep lights low in the evening. Turn off the TV, music and computer an hour before bedtime and encourage a soothing nighttime routine, such as reading a novel or writing in a journal. Also, discourage your kids from exercising within three hours of bedtime, advises James B. Maas, Ph.D., a professor in the psychology department.

wake-up call

Ninety percent of parents believe their kids get enough shut-eye some nights of the week, according to an NSF poll. Since that’s *not* the case, be on the lookout for these signs of sleep deprivation. Your child ...

1. repeatedly sleeps through his alarm clock or needs several wake-up calls before he gets out of bed.
2. drinks caffeinated beverages to make it through the day.
3. sleeps more than two hours past normal waking hour on weekends.
4. is irritable or anxious on days he’s skimped on sleep.
5. falls asleep in school.
6. takes weekday naps.

Photo: John Lamb/Getty Images.

ment at Cornell University. "Working out increases adrenaline and tightens muscles, making it hard to relax," he says. In the morning open the shades and turn on the lights—even on weekends. "Don't

let your child sleep more than two hours past his normal waking hour or his body clock will have difficulty readjusting once the school week begins," says Carskadon. Also discourage afternoon naps lasting more than 30 minutes.

A DELAYED START

When Minneapolis high schools shifted their start time from 7:15 A.M. to 8:40 A.M. nearly a decade ago, students averaged an hour more sleep per night, had better attendance and reported being more awake in their morning classes. Now 250 to 300 school districts nationwide have made the switch, says Kyla Wahlstrom, Ph.D., director of the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Could your district be next? "Print out the research (education.umn.edu/CAREI/) and bring up the idea with other parents, administrators and the school board," says Wahlstrom.

SLEEP STEALER

a crazy schedule

We all want high-achievers, but a jam-packed schedule can rob kids of needed sleep. "There's more pressure today to participate in many different activities to get into good colleges," says Maas. "Sleep gets shoved out of the way." Research shows part-time employment also takes a toll. A survey of more than 3,000 high school students revealed that for every 10 hours worked, students lost 14 minutes of sleep per night.

Put it to rest Help your child choose two extracurricular activities per semester. "Kids who get more sleep get

better grades," says Mindell. And make sure that afterschool jobs don't exceed 20 hours a week, advises Carskadon.

SLEEP STEALER

a more serious health condition

One in four children have sleep problems that warrant a physician's attention. Yet they often go unrecognized. "There are 81 known sleep disorders," says Maas. "It's easy to miss the signs." **Put it to rest** If daytime drowsiness or nighttime insomnia persists despite making the lifestyle changes above, talk to your pediatrician. He may refer you to a sleep center, which could diagnose a disorder such as sleep apnea or narcolepsy. If a physical ailment is ruled out, request a referral to a therapist specializing in teens. Your child may be depressed or experiencing other emotional troubles, says Mindell. ●

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