

## e. HEALTHY ADOLESCENT SLEEP



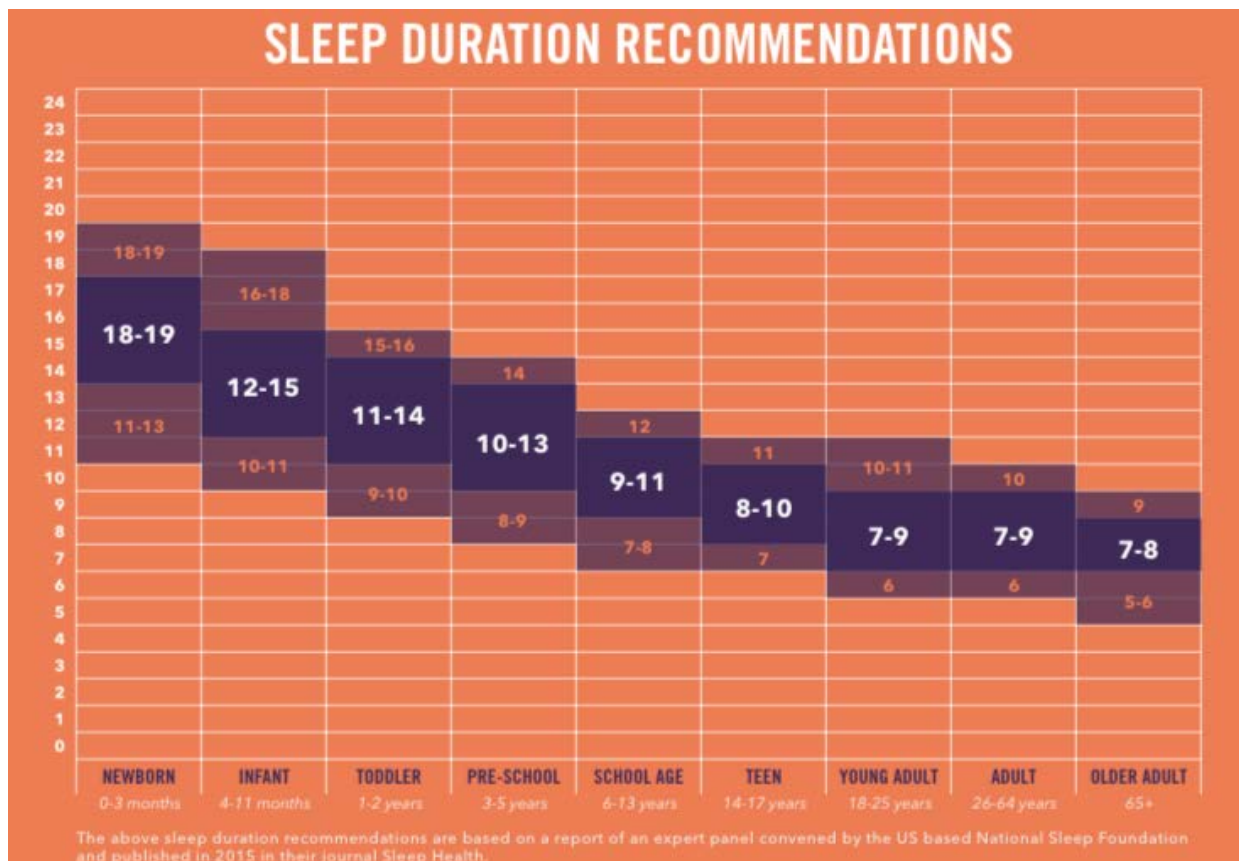
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- **Healthy Sleep Patterns**

Making sleep a priority is essential. Evidence suggests that suicidal ideation and behaviors are closely associated with sleep disturbances, and in some cases, this association appears to exist above and beyond depression ([Roberts et al 2001](#); [Bernert et al 2005](#)). Both sleep disorders and general sleep complaints appear to be linked to greater levels of suicidal ideation and depression, as well as both attempted and completed suicide ([Krakow et al 2000](#); [Agargun et al 1997a](#); [Fawcett et al 1990](#)).

It likely comes as no surprise that Americans today report feeling chronically exhausted and sleep deprived.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends 8-10 hours of sleep per night for adolescents ages 14-17, yet the average that our students actually get is between 6-8 hours. Teens have a lot of demands on their time and have difficulty balancing those demands with their need for sleep. Most schools start early in the morning, and after a long day they then have to study for hours at night.



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[UCLA's Sleep Disorders Center](#) provides compelling information regarding a shift in sleep for youth during puberty. During this stage of development, girls and boys begin to experience biological changes. Typically, girls begin to enter the stage of puberty earlier than boys. One change in the body during puberty is closely related to how you sleep. There is a shift in the timing of your circadian rhythms. Before puberty, the body is usually in sleep mode around 8:00 or 9:00 pm. As puberty begins, this rhythm shifts to a couple hours later where the body is told to go to sleep at around 10:00 or 11:00 pm.

Teens are also faced with other responsibilities that compete for their time. They frequently participate in after school activities including competitive sports that can take up many hours daily, clubs, and most want to spend time with friends socializing. Once they are old enough, they may begin to look for work after school to help out their families. They may be required to look after younger siblings or need academic tutoring. There is simply not enough time in the day to get it all done, so something has to give. Most frequently, they choose to give up sleep.

Those with mental health issues, particularly anxiety, depression, bi-polar disorder and ADHD are even more likely to suffer from sleep difficulties. Chronic sleep problems affect 50%-80% of patients in a typical psychiatric practice and recent studies are showing that chronic sleep problems increase the risk of developing these mental health problems. Getting a good night's sleep fosters improved mood, ability to cope (resiliency) and mental health, while lack of sleep sets the stage for emotional vulnerability and negative thought patterns. Up to 90% of adolescents being treated for depression report difficulty sleeping. Studies have found that among those who had thought about ending their lives, the risk went up significantly depending on how little

they slept. Additionally, each additional hour of sleep decreased the likelihood of suicidal thoughts. (*University of Pennsylvania: <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2013/may/more-sleep-reduces-suicide-ris>*)

- **Signs and Solutions**

Some signs that indicate a student might not be getting enough sleep include:

- Having trouble waking up most mornings
- Acting irritable in the early afternoon
- Falling asleep easily during the day
- Having a sudden drop in grades
- Sleeping for very long periods on the weekends (*UCLA Sleep Disorders Center*)

So what can we do about it? Good sleep is essential to a good outlook on life and thus decreased risk of suicidality. The treatment fundamentals for insomnia (the most common sleep disturbance) are the same regardless of whether one is suffering from a mental health issue, or just struggling to get the amount of rest they need. The UCLA Sleep Disorders Center recommends the following list of tips for families who are hoping to help youth get the sleep they need.

- **Tips for Parents**

1. Parents should create a calm atmosphere in the home at bedtime.
2. Teens should have a regular, relaxing routine just before bedtime. They often have busy, hectic schedules. They need a chance to unwind at night.
3. To help them relax, teens should avoid activities that will excite their senses late in the evening. They should find another time for computer games, action movies, intense reading or heavy studying at least half an hour before going to bed.\*
4. They should not have anything with caffeine (including soda and chocolate) after 4:00 pm.
5. They should also avoid smoking and drinking (and any other substance use). Along with hurting their health, nicotine and alcohol and other drugs will disturb their sleep.
6. A regular exercise routine and a healthy diet will help them sleep better at night. They should also get outside as much as possible
7. Keep the lights dim in the evening. Open the curtains or blinds to let in bright light in the morning. This helps keep their body clocks set at the right time.
8. If they must take a nap, they should keep it to under an hour.
9. It can be hard for teens to get enough sleep during the week. They may need to wake up later on weekends. But they should not wake up more than two hours later than the time when they normally rise on a weekday. Sleeping in longer than that will severely disrupt a teen's body clock. This will make it even harder to wake up on time when Monday morning arrives.

\* **Screen time:** *It has become evident that staring at a screen right before bedtime can interfere with sleep, so the habit of ending the day with social media, video games or Netflix is not helpful to good sleep. Turn everything off at least a half an hour before you plan to try to go to sleep and do something relaxing, such as reading a book, taking a bath or listening to relaxing music.*

For many, further steps must be taken to aid sleep. Meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation (alternately tensing and releasing muscles) can counter anxiety and racing thoughts. Some phone apps that can be downloaded to help include:

- Sleep Genius
- Sleep Cycle
- Nature Sounds Relax And Sleep
- Pzizz Sleep
- Relax Melodies
- Sleep As Android
- Sleep Time
- Sleepmaker Rain
- Awoken (*Android*)
- DigiPill

Some believe that poor sleep habits are learned. Since people with insomnia tend to become preoccupied with not falling asleep, cognitive behavioral techniques help them to change negative expectations and try to build more confidence that they can have a good night's sleep. A therapist can help with teaching these techniques.

- **Key Takeaways**

A couple of key takeaways and points to remember when advocating for the importance of sleep in youth are as follows:

1. Fine-tune your sleep routine
2. Optimize your sleep environment
3. Time your stimulants
4. Use light to your advantage
5. Get enough hours! ([\*Adapted from PRYMD Module 7 Sleep\*](#))

Lastly, if all of these changes are not enough, there are medications that can be prescribed by a doctor to help treat insomnia. In some cases, the medications used to help treat a mental health disorder can also treat insomnia at the same time. The studies suggest that treating insomnia could be another tool in the fight against suicide and should always be taken into consideration when helping this population.