

Losing Sleep

By Faye Williamson

Sleep is an essential requirement for day to day life, but according to Dr Sarah Blunden, of the Australian Centre for Education in Sleep (ACES), our children are missing out on more sleep than ever.

Blunden says US studies show children are sleeping on average 30 minutes less today than they were 20 years ago – a sleep debt for which they are paying a hefty price.

The Importance of sleep

Sleep experts agree that while children are sleeping their bodies are hard at work. During sleep the brain restores itself, growth hormones are released, memories are consolidated and unnecessary information is discarded. Dr Blunden explains “Insufficient sleep has been linked with learning problems, inability to concentrate and even lower IQs, according to some studies”.

Consequences of not getting enough sleep

- Behaviour - anti-social, irritable, hyperactive and unable to regulate emotions.
- Planning - poorly organised, repeating grades and forgetting lessons.
- Concentration - inattentive and falling behind in class.
- Creativity - doesn't work to its full potential.
- Problem solving - poor behaviour control and difficulty in social situations.
- Complicated thinking - struggles with maths, sciences and abstract concepts.

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- Motor co-ordination - less sporty, more accidents and clumsier.
- Weight - increased weight is more likely with less sleep.
- Health - poorer immune system.

How much sleep do we need?

ACES provides a guideline for the optimum amount of sleep:

- Babies under 1: 14-18 hours throughout the day and night.
- Toddlers: 12-14 hours per 24 hour period.
- Primary School children: 10-12 hours per night.



- High School students: 9-11 hours per night.
- Adults: 7-9 hours per day.

What changes must we make?

Dr Blunden urges parents to adopt a “good sleep hygiene” - that is, positive habits that enable us to sleep. She suggests we should:

- Enforce regular bed times (on both school nights and weekends).
- Set up a relaxing and enjoyable bedtime routine to help children wind down comfortably.
- Ban sugary drinks and snacks, as well as spicy foods, 3-4 hours before bedtime.
- Remove technology and other distractions from the sleeping environment.
- Discourage vigorous exercise 1 hour before bedtime - it raises body temperatures.

Sleep Education

World Sleep Day 2011 marked the launch of Philips' new education module available to teachers. The Sleep Module was developed in collaboration with Dr Sarah Blunden and ACES and is distributed by the World Association of Sleep Medicine (WASM).

The module helps children understand why sleep is so important. Module assignments allow the children to identify bad sleeping habits and through play acting, they learn to distinguish peaceful and disturbed sleep.

For more information visit, <http://www.philips.com/about/sustainability/ourcommunities> ■