

TEEN NUTRITION BLUEPRINT

keep dreaming

For teenagers, getting enough sleep can be a challenge. The fact that a growing body requires more sleep is often pitted against the tendency of teens to burn the candle at both ends. You should aim for at least nine hours a night.

Why is Sleep Important?

When you get the quality sleep you need, your body is refreshed, your mind is clear, and you generally feel more optimistic about everything. When you are sleep-deprived, you become sluggish, less responsive and can even feel depressed. Lack of sleep is blamed for such ailments as depression, hypertension, irritability, slower reaction times, and tremors.

REM (The Sleep Stage, Not the Band)

REM stands for rapid eye movement and is a reference to the phase of deep sleep where the most restful zzz's of the night occur. The brain and the body "refuel" during this crucial phase. You get to REM by cycling through four phases of sleep. Once in REM you generally spend an average of 15 minutes there. At the conclusion of this cycle, your brain is generally brought in reverse back to Phase 1, where you will once again slide back again towards another restful REM.

Do Not Disturb

Sleep is most beneficial when undisturbed. If you're startled and awoken from your sleep, you can't pick up where you left off on the way to REM. You have to start all over again. That's why it's important to get as many full 90-minute cycles in as you can during the course of one night's sleep. In fact, ironically, research has shown that if given the choice to either complete just two full cycles of deep sleep (three hours) or be woken up in the middle of your fourth cycle somewhere around five and a half hours of sleep...you would likely feel less groggy and more raring to go in the first scenario than the last.

In the Cycle

Nine hours would represent six full sleep cycles and 90 minutes of REM. Cutting it shorter than that by even just an hour or staying in bed an extra hour would both lead to an interrupted cycle. Thinking of your sleeping pattern in terms of 90-minute cycles can simplify the formula. Need to sleep in on a rainy Sunday? Extend it to 7 full cycles, or 10 ½ hours. Got a night where you know you're going to have to study late for a big test? Aim for five cycles (or 7 ½ hours of sleep).

Make
healthy
choices

Tips for Better Sleep

- Don't hit the snooze button. This interrupts your sleep cycle and could make you groggy.
- Don't eat just before bed, especially sugar and caffeine products. Have your last meal or snack two hours before bed.
- Set the right mood for sleep. Develop a ritual that helps your body to know it is time to sleep. Some read books, others take a hot shower.
- Create a sleep-friendly environment. It can be hard to sleep when you feel the day's pressure or the next bearing down on you. Put away your homework and schoolbooks so they are out of sight. Make a list of priorities for the next day.
- Melatonin is a natural sleep aid. Many doctors will recommend it as a daily supplement to help young people and adults alike with their sleep problems. It is nonaddictive and non-habit-forming.

