



School Starts Too Early for Teenagers!



Another study has confirmed what most teenagers will tell you: *school starts too early!* The teenage “bioclock” or circadian rhythm is set later than it is for younger children and adults. Most studies estimate about a 2 hour sleep-wake phase delay compared with younger children.

Translation: It’s hard for teenagers to fall asleep much before 10-11pm. This observation has been shown across all cultures and ethnic groups. Yet school start times are usually earliest for the teenage group, often starting at 7:30am.

Though teenagers have trouble falling asleep, their sleep requirement is still nearly 9 hours/night and “sleeping late on weekends” doesn’t work for catch-up. Many teenagers have been shown to be chronically sleep deprived.

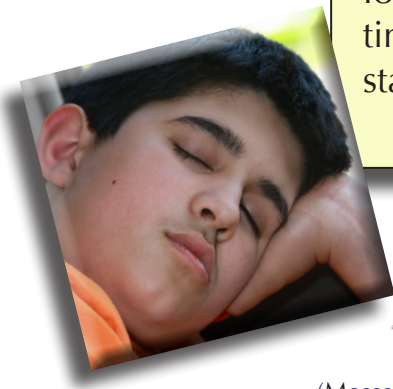
In a Rhode Island school, delaying school start time until 8:30am had a dramatic positive impact on students’ lives. The proportion of students who got less than 7 hours of sleep on school nights decreased from 34% to 7%, and over half of the students slept more than 8 hours.

The number of students who felt “too tired” to do schoolwork, socialize, or participate in school activities decreased significantly. Absentee rates decreased by nearly half! The numbers of depressed, “easily annoyed” or unhappy teens decreased by over 20%. Other similar studies have shown that tired teenagers have more car accidents, poorer grades, less exercise (with associated weight gain).

We encourage parents to open discussions with their local school boards and PTA’s to discuss later school start times. We know bus and sports schedules are complex, but start times can and should be changed.

by Doug Puder, MD

Benefits for students were dramatic when school start time changed to 8:30am,!



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