

Sleep - 14-16 year olds

Sleep is essential for good health, so make sure your teen is getting enough rest. Without enough sleep, they will struggle. Some symptoms include tiredness, irritability, lack of concentration, poor diet (not wanting to eat, or eating too many of the wrong things) and they're less likely to exercise. All of which will poorly influence how they feel and how well they cope with school life and life in general.

Many teens don't get enough sleep – either because they're revising into the

small hours or more interesting temptations (such as box sets and social media) encourage them to stay awake. Being in bed doesn't count as being asleep! Teens need a lot of sleep – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night – given the huge changes taking place in their bodies. To make sure they're getting enough, work backwards. If they have to get up at 7.00am, then they need to be asleep by 11.00pm latest – which probably means heading to bed much earlier. At GCSE age, they should really be in bed by 10.00 pm latest.

Try to give your child at least 30 minutes screen-free time before bed



A bedtime routine

Creating a “bedtime” routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep. Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off, so try to get your teen into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time (especially on weeknights, but even at the weekend too).

A little calm time before bed means avoiding stimulation. Studies should be packed away, no exciting films or video games, no high tempo music or bright lights. If they're prone to worrying, keeping a notebook where any nagging thoughts or important things to do the next day can be jotted down. This will help stop them worrying about forgetting things and can help prevent the mind turning over once the lights go out.

If they share a room, curtaining off their sleeping area helps give them some personal space.

- [NHS Foundation Trust](#)
- [Teen Sleep Hub](#)

Be firm

It's not easy telling teens what to do, but if you can be firm about bedtime and winding down before sleep when they're in their mid-teens, there's a better chance they'll continue good habits by themselves in the future.

Try to have conversations with your teen about using mobiles sensibly, at times when neither of you are tired or emotional, to avoid heated discussions or rows. This way you're much more likely to reach a compromise that suits you both.

Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings. Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to a regular cycle. Make plans for weekend mornings so they have a reason to get up.

Mobiles and screens – the enemy of sleep!

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by your teen's ready access to a 24/7 online community via social media, not to mention their compulsion to play games and catch up with box sets late into the night.

Encourage good habits. At least 30 mins screen-free time before settling down to sleep is always a good idea. It doesn't mean doing nothing – they could listen to audio books, podcasts or relaxing music, where the phone is closed (so no glare or visual stimulation) and they can enjoy listening to something relaxing as they drift off to sleep. There are timers too, so they don't need to fret that if they do fall asleep, their phone will be running all night.

Set phones to bedtime mode during sleeping hours so that they're not distracted by the tempting ping of alerts and messages – which they feel they must immediately view. Encourage them to use the “Do not disturb” feature if their phone has one, which will automatically silence incoming calls and messages at the same time each night (they can make exceptions for emergency numbers) and use the phone's night screen settings to reduces glare throughout the evening (white light on bright screens prevents sleepiness). Establishing good phone habits now will benefit them hugely later in life too.

Other ways to reduce phone time

Create rules for the whole family – such as no phones at the table during mealtimes, no phones before school, no phones after 9:00 pm. If you do this, it's important you're consistent (don't set a bad example by ignoring the rule if it doesn't suit you!). Establish rewards for appropriate phone use.

Some wireless providers allow you to set daily phone use limits, so you could add time limits for all apps, or different time limits for different apps. You could try the app OurPact, which enables you to block or grant access to internet time, from anywhere. Netflix allows you to modify user preferences, so you can restrict your teen watching at inappropriate times or block programmes and box sets that you don't want them to watch (removal won't be instant but will filter through). You could make some things available only via your profile so you're aware of what and when your child is watching. mSpy lets parents monitor their children's phone activity from their own devices.

Walk your talk!

Are you setting a good example? The older your child gets, the harder it is for you to insist on what they do, but you can encourage them by being a great role model. It might be harder for them to get into good sleep routines if they see you are not following the advice you give them.

