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# Dr. Rugo Focht's Guide to Sleep Hygiene

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## Why Sleep is Important

- Maintaining a healthy body
- 'cleaning up the brain'
- helping the immune system
- improving energy levels, learning and concentration



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As children reach puberty, their bodies start to secrete Melatonin later at night which in turn affects their **Circadian Rhythm**: The 24 hour internal clock that controls our sleeping and waking patterns. Therefore, teens want to go to bed late and wake up later. On average, teens should be getting 9 ½ hours of sleep a night to maintain the best level of alertness, concentration and learning. It is important to know that sleep and your child's mental health and well being are closely connected. Being tired

all of the time can contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Mental health issues can also contribute to sleeping problems as well. Remember that any new stressors such as school, social changes and new responsibilities can play a huge role in affecting your child's sleep. Therefore, it is important to communicate with your child about what's going on around them.

## Signs of Sleeping Problems

Here is a list of behavior changes associated with lack of sleep or sleeping problems.

- lacks energy or constantly feels tired
- takes a long time to get to sleep
- repeatedly wakes throughout the night and doesn't go back to sleep
- struggles to wake or refuses to get out of bed in the morning
- naps for long periods during the day or falls asleep at school
- struggles to concentrate or remember information
- has very irregular sleep patterns from day to day
- sleepwalks or gets up and eats during the night while asleep

- has frequent nightmares or sleep terrors.

## Remedies

- Arrange a strict "Sleep-Wake" schedule - even on the weekends. Even if your child struggles the night before, wake them up at the appointed time the next morning and avoid naps during the day. Have them go to bed at the scheduled time that night.
- Establish a "before-bed" ritual. Appoint a certain time of night to wind down. This can include reading or any calming activity. A warm bath/shower before bed can relax your child.
- Having a snack before bed that is high in Tryptophan may help induce sleep. These foods include cottage cheese, cashews, chicken, turkey, soybeans and tuna. Having a warm glass of milk before bed may also release tryptophan and induce sleepiness. Avoid caffeine late in the day and right before bed.

- Turn off all electronics including laptops, desktops, T.V.s, iPads, iPods and iPhones. Bright screens can disrupt the Circadian Rhythm especially in a dark room. A study published in the Journal of Pediatrics surveyed a population of Philadelphia teens and found 90% went to bed with cell phones, 79% with music devices, ⅔ had TV's in the bedroom and ⅓ had computers. Have your child associate their bed with only sleeping. Therefore, avoid having them do homework or surfing the internet while laying in bed. It is also recommended to avoid scary, violent or action packed movies/video games before bed.
- Change the environment of your child's bedroom to a calm, quiet and dark space. Earplugs are good for a noisy house. Sleep masks and dark curtains are also a great addition.
- Good health and nutrition are key components to a good night's sleep. Many teens are deficient in Calcium and Magnesium which can help with sleeping problems. These minerals can be found in leafy green vegetables, unrefined grains and nuts, seeds, beans and legumes.
- Another home remedy for sleep may be relaxing aromatherapy. Examples include: Lavender oil, Orange Blossom, Marjoram and Chamomile. Sprinkle these scents on the pillow case or set in a diffuser nearby.
- From personal experience, Chinaberry books (Chinaberry.com) offers CDs by Jim Weiss whose soothing voice and guided imagery help induce drowsiness. I also recommend soft music or pre-recorded sound tracks - e.g. running water, ocean sounds, etc.





