

Sleep Should Be On Every School Supply List

By Ronette Dill

As students and families prepare to transition from the lazy days of summer to the opening weeks of a new school year, purchasing school supplies, shoes, clothes and backpacks seem to be on the minds of most children and adults. However, there is one very important aspect of school preparation that is often overlooked in early August, SLEEP.

Did you know that sleep is no less important than food, drink or safety in the lives of school-age children? Good, sound sleep helps ensure proper body and brain development. Sleeping well helps increase a child's attention span. Children who get enough sleep are more likely to function better and are less prone to behavior problems and learning difficulties.

As you are preparing for the first day of school, make sleep a priority in your household by keeping these things in mind:

1. Maintain a regular and consistent sleep schedule
2. Create a relaxing bedtime routine that does not involve screen time
3. Sleep in the same quiet, cool, and dark environment each night
4. Avoid caffeine after noon, as the effects can last from 8-14 hours
5. Avoid vigorous physical activity about two hours before bed

Current research recommends the following hours of sleep, for school-age children, to support positive growth and development:

Children, ages 3-5, should get 10-13 hours of sleep per day.

Children, ages 5-13, should get 9-11 hours of sleep per day.

Teens, ages 14-17, should get 8-10 hours of sleep per day.

What happens when school-age children do not get the recommended hours of sleep? Approximately six out of ten kids get too little sleep. The negative effect of sleep deprivation in young children is well supported by existing literature. Lack of sleep impairs attention, alertness, concentration, reasoning and problem solving. The decrease in attention and working memory due to lack of sleep is also well established.

Children do not react the same way to sleep deprivation as adults do. As adults, we get sleepy. Children tend to become hyperactive. If you or your child's teacher notices changes in your child, such as increased moodiness, aggression or impulsivity; difficulty coping with change; or a lack of motivation, make it a point to investigate and improve your child's sleep habits. It is quite possible that both you, the teacher, and your child's

classmates will notice a positive change in your child, when you make sleep a priority.

National polls have shown that more than 87% of US high school students get far less than the recommended 8-10 hours of sleep each night. Sleep deprivation increases the likelihood teens may suffer negative consequences, such as the inability to concentrate, poor grades, injuries, drowsy-driving incidents, risk-taking behavior, anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide and even suicide attempts.

The Sleep Revolution, written by Arianna Huffington, also mentions how sleep deprivation may lead to a suppressed immune system, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, stroke, degraded emotional intelligence, irritability and mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety in adults.

Sleep plays a critical role in the learning process. Many scientists argue that the primary purpose of sleep is memory/learning consolidation, so sleep should be considered a learning tool. If children stay up too late, research has proven that they will have difficulty recalling basic facts, figures and new words the following day. Sleep is essential for cognitive performance, especially memory/learning consolidation. Sleep allows the brain time to strengthen neural connections, consolidate memory and create links between new and old knowledge.

As summer winds down, take time to consider the importance of sleep and how it can make a positive impact on your child's success in school. By making sleep a family priority, more students will wake up rested and ready to function well, physically and mentally, throughout the school year.

Remember, sleep is one of the most important activities we all can do to keep our bodies and brains healthy!

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Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) is a group of 80+ community members, leaders and health professionals, all working together to plan and implement effective strategies to promote wellness in our community. We welcome any individual who is interested in joining us to make our community a healthier place for all. For more information and a list of our 2017 meeting dates, please visit our

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