

## But I'm not tired!

Help your teen get more (and better quality) sleep

Sixteen-year-old Canton High School junior Shea Rhodes doesn't usually go to bed until 2:30 a.m. on weeknights. So naturally, getting up for school can be a little rough. "It takes several attempts every morning to get him out of bed. He takes naps when he gets home, then can't sleep. It is a vicious circle," says his mother, Beth Rhodes. The problem is Shea just isn't getting enough sleep.

This isn't news to many parents of teens. According to a study by the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 69 percent of high school students sleep less than seven hours each night, versus only 8 percent who get the ideal amount of nine hours or more. The deficit leads to all sorts of problems, ranging from general crabbiness and poor grades to more critical situations like depression and drowsy driving.

Often, parents get frustrated, blaming their teen for staying up too late at night. But it may not be their fault. "Children entering puberty experience a biological change, a shift in body rhythm," says Dr. Lawrence MacDonald, medical director for The Center for Respiratory and Sleep Disorders in Novi. This causes teens to stay up later, and thus they need to arise later. "Parents think their child is just being lazy, but it's the way their brains are set. It's like they have permanent jet lag," Dr. MacDonald says.

Although there's a biological cause, a typical teenager's lifestyle plays a contributing factor as well. Staying up late on Facebook, playing videogames and watching T.V. all negatively affect a teenager's inner body clock. So what's a conscientious parent to do in order to help his or her teen get a good night's sleep?

"Encourage your child to take a look at his or her schedule: Sports, extracurricular and social activities," says Dr. MacDonald. "Have them figure out what time they need to get up in the morning, and then work backwards from there." MacDonald's other tips include:



Illustration by Stephanie Limon

- Set a communication curfew. Half an hour before bedtime, have your teen hand over all electronic devices and turn off the T.V.
- Establish a bedtime routine. Encourage your teen to wind down each night by reading or listening to mellow music.
- Avoid caffeine after lunch. It stays in the system for hours, making sleep difficult.
- Avoid bright lights in evening; darkness lets your body know it's time for sleep.

If your teen uses these techniques and still can't fall asleep by a reasonable hour, consult a sleep specialist. "Up to 10 percent of teens experience something called Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome," Dr. MacDonald says. "Some kids can't go to bed before 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., even if they want to." But it's very treatable.

"We see a lot of it," Dr. MacDonald says. "Within a few weeks to a month, we can reset their body clock." **MP**

— Holly Bowne is mother of two teens and freelancer writer from Novi.