



# Is Your Teen Staying Up All Night?

Pro Tips for Promoting Healthy Sleep During COVID-19



**Due to the lack of school and structure resulting from COVID-19 stay at home orders, teens may struggle to maintain a regular sleep schedule.**

Sleep is very important for growing teens because it helps the brain create pathways to learn new things and form memories. It also helps regulate mood, hunger and weight. Lack of sleep can contribute to poor performance in school, depressed mood, anxiety, weight gain and acne.

If you're a parent struggling to create some sort of teen sleep normalcy during this unprecedented time, here are a few tips from board-certified sleep physician **Parina S. Aggarwal, MD, D.ABIM.**

Know that teens tend to be night owls and it's not always because they're trying to be resistant to parental suggestions. It is biologically normal for teens to have later biologic sleep clocks called "circadian rhythms." It's best to let them sleep to their natural rhythm if their school schedule permits, but there are things that can push their clocks later that they should avoid.

- 1. Minimize screen time 2 hours before bedtime. Light from screens can further delay a teenager's natural biological sleep clock.** Apps, news, games, and social media can be very activating making it difficult to put down the phone or wind down. Replace that time with reading a book, listening to audiobooks, music or a podcast. Encourage family time and consider a family activity like board games or playing cards. Ideally, if your teen has difficulty giving up electronics at night, consider allowing him or her to use it for listening instead. Content should be relaxing and not overly engaging or disturbing as this can impair the brain's ability to wind down for sleep.
- 2. While it's important to keep things dark at night, it's equally important to have adequate light, particularly sunlight exposure during the day.** This queues the body that it's daytime and helps with alertness during the day. Encourage your teen to get outside and enjoy the weather.
- 3. Wake up at the same time every day. Come up with a wake time that you both agree on.** Don't be surprised if your teen prefers to wake up later in the morning. This is normal due to later circadian rhythms at this age. Most teens need about 8-10 hours of sleep each night and many teens suffer from sleep deprivation. Studies show this generation of teens is more sleep deprived than any other generation in the past.

**4. Avoid long and late naps.** Naps over 30 minutes, particularly in the late afternoon or evening may impair your teen's ability to fall and stay asleep. Our circadian rhythm dips in the early afternoon and it is normal to feel sleepy around that time. Limit naps to no more than 15-20 minutes, and consider setting an alarm.

**5. Exercise during the day may help your teen fall asleep faster and reach deeper, more restful stages of sleep.** Get out for a walk, run, or bike ride together or if possible, consider a fun virtual class such as yoga, karate or Zumba.

**6. Avoid caffeinated products after 2 p.m.** This includes dark sodas, sweet tea, coffee, energy drinks and dark chocolate. Even decaffeinated products can have small amounts of caffeine that may impact sleep for some. Caffeine can cause difficulty falling and staying asleep.

**7. Help your teen come up with a wind down routine an hour before bedtime.** This may include brushing teeth, showering, stretching, reading, getting ready for the next day, etc. By incorporating the same exact routine every night, the brain is queued that it's time for sleep.

**8. Consider making it a family goal to develop healthy sleep habits.**

A lack of sleep schedule limits during childhood years can predispose individuals to insomnia in adulthood. Parental behaviors can influence teen behaviors.

**Start with these tips and soon you and your family will be on your way to better sleep resulting in better mental and physical health.**



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Dr. Parina S. Aggarwal is a board-certified sleep physician with an expertise in internal medicine. She grew up in Atlanta, attended Georgia Tech on a full academic Presidential scholarship and graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. Dr. Aggarwal subsequently attended Emory University School of Medicine where she completed a residency in internal medicine and fellowship in sleep medicine at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Aggarwal joined FusionSleep in 2013 and served as medical director for our sister company, FusionHealth, for 3 years. As medical director, she developed TeleHealth protocols for sleep health programs sponsored by various corporations for their employees, providing assessment, study interpretation, and medical management of remote patients and working closely with field and technology teams to develop task-driven protocols through the use of technology. She currently spends most of her time at FusionSleep providing consultative and follow up assessments as well as diagnostic interpretations for patients. Dr. Aggarwal takes a special interest in sleep and its relation to chronic medical disorders such as diabetes, hypertension, atrial fibrillation, stroke and heart disease.