

So That's What's Wrong With Teenagers!

Teens Might Learn More if School Started at 11:00 am

by Mike Dempster

Hey sleepyhead. Wake up. yeah, we're talking to you — the typical teenager who might get six hours of sleep a night, works a part-time job, plays in a band and can barely stay awake in English class. We've got some news for you: cheating on sleep turns young people into doughheads.

Some intelligence-type tests show that a teen's IQ drops when deprived of sleep," says Dr. Stan Coren, a neuro-physiologist at the University of British Columbia. Coren says teens "ideally" require nine to 10 hours of sleep, but average seven to seven and a half.

"For each hour under eight hours of sleep, you lose one point in IQ," Coren says. "And for every hour below seven, you can lose two points of IQ." And it's cumulative.

Brighter students with IQs around 115 or more can survive that loss and still cope. But, Coren says, an average teen with a 100 IQ who cheats on his sleep by two hours a night for a week is toast when an exam rolls around on a Friday. That student can lose up to 15 IQ points, which leaves him with a below-average IQ of 85.

The good news, says Coren, whose research was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* this year, is that students can wipe out the IQ deficit with a couple of good nights' sleep on the weekend. Unfortunately, teens tend to get even busier on Friday and Saturday nights, he says, and parents often badger their kids to get out of the sack on weekend mornings.

"There's never a typical night of sleep," says Jennifer Coppens, who would love to get nine hours of sleep — just once. The 19-year-old high school student shares a basement suite with three other teens, works a part-time job 25 hours a week and is in a co-op work program as well. Coren's

theory about IQ deficit makes sense, says Coppens, who recently bombed out on a Friday exam and routinely nods off in math class. "Most days I wake up tired or even feeling sick."

Too Little Sleep

- ⇒ **The essentials: Ideally teens need nine to ten hours sleep, the same as a 10- or 11-year-old.**
- ⇒ **Effects: Lack of sleep can cause poor concentration, crankiness and mood swings.**
- ⇒ **In Winter: People feel lethargic because of the lack of sunlight. The sun kickstarts our biological clock. Researchers suggest using the brightest lights possible in your home.**
- ⇒ **Foods: Everyone knows coffee and tea contain caffeine that interrupts sleep patterns. Teens should be wary of drinking pop or citrus drinks after dinner because they also contain caffeine.**
- ⇒ **Chocolate: It's a big no-no because it contains theobromides, which are stimulants related to amphetamines.**

Coren and Dr. Lawrence Pawluk, from the University of Calgary's department of psychiatry and medicine, say sleepy teenagers are victims of biology. Young peoples' biological clocks change at puberty, Pawluk says. They naturally start wanting to stay up later and rise later.

"Teens are out of sync with society," says Pawluk, who believes state legislators in Minnesota have the right idea. "That's one state where kids don't start until 9:00 am or 9:30 am, and I think it's made a great difference in their ability to function in school. They don't nod off in the morning class, they don't skip the morning class because they've slept in. "School kind of fits in with their clocks."

Most students can get away once in a while with pulling an all-nighter before exams, Pawluk says, but he recommends a good night's sleep instead. Coren says more reports about students falling asleep in class disturb him. "If the pressure to sleep gets strong enough, you microsleep," Coren says, describing a situation where "regardless of what you're doing, your brain enters a sleep state of, say, between ten seconds and a minute."

That can be dangerous, Coren says. "If you're driving a car 50 kilometres an hour and microsleep for 10 seconds, you'll travel about 450 feet (140 metres)." You can do a lot of damage in that ten seconds, says Coren, who suggests microsleep is a factor to consider in the high accident rate of teenage drivers.

The bottom line is people need sleep. "Otherwise, a lack of sleep makes you clumsy, stupid, unhappy and dead."

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