

# KIDS NEED MORE SLEEP TO GET BETTER GRADES

Sorry, parents, but you might need to start enforcing bedtime. Or letting your kids sleep in. **Sleep deprivation or not getting enough hours of sleep is linked to a slew of negatives academic and health consequences.** But, how much sleep should our students get? Is it all about quantity or about better sleep efficiency?

While no one likes a bedtime battle, a new study shows that a good night's sleep can translate to improved academic performance. Researchers at McGill University and the Douglas Mental Health

University Institute in Montreal found that children who had a better quality sleep performed better in math and languages

Sleep plays a fundamental role in the way we learn. Poor quality of sleep – caused by lots of waking up during the night – has been reported to be a strong predictor of lower academic performance, reduced capacity for attention, poor executive function and challenging behaviors during the day. Emerging evidence makes a compelling case for the importance of sleep for language learning, memory, executive

function, problem solving and behaviour during childhood.

## MORE VERSUS BETTER SLEEP

Sleep plays a critical role in academic children's performance. A new study from McGill University and the Douglas Mental Health University Institute in Montreal finds that getting a good night's rest is not just about the quantity of sleep. The researchers investigated the connection between academic performance and what they call 'sleep efficiency', or the ratio of time spent in bed to time spent sleeping. **They found that better sleep efficiency—more sleep for the amount of time spent in bed at night—is linked to better grades.**

Study leader Reut Gruber, professor in McGill's Department of Psychiatry explains that sleep plays a larger role in academic performance than most may realize. "We believe that executive functions (the mental skills involved in planning, paying attention, and multitasking, for example) underlie the impact of sleep on academic performance, and these skills are more critical in math and languages than other subjects. Short or poor sleep is a significant risk factor for poor academic performance that is frequently ignored".

In a recent study involving 48 students between 16 and 19-years-old recruited through an independent sixth form college in central London, researches at the Lifespan Learning and Sleep Laboratory at UCL examined the link between sleep, academic performance and environmental factors. Their results showed that the majority of the teenagers achieved just over seven hours of sleep, with an average bedtime at 11.37pm. The study showed that a longer amount of sleep and earlier bedtimes – measures of sleep quantity – were most strongly correlated with better academic results obtained by the students



"Sleep, especially deep sleep, is like a balm for the brain, Sleep is believed to help regulate emotions, and its deprivation is an underlying component of many mood disorders, such as anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder. For students who are prone to these disorders, better sleep can help serve as a buffer and help prevent a downhill slide"

*Shashank Joshi, MD, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford.*

on a number of tests taken at school. In contrast, measures that were indicative of sleep quality were mostly linked with students' performances on verbal reasoning tests and on grade point averages on tests at school.

So it appears from their results that "longer sleep" is more closely related to academic performance, while "good night sleep" is more closely related to overall cognitive processing.

**The National Sleep Foundation recommends that children ages five to 12 get 10-11 hours of sleep a night. (Teenagers need about 9 hours, but studies suggest only 15% of them get it.)** If your child currently clocks in less than that, it might be time for a bed time reevaluation.

In previous studies, clinical psychologist Reut Gruberand and her team looked at sleep extension—adding hours to sleep time—and while they didn't look at math, they did study behavior and attention and saw an improvement in both areas.



If your children are surfing the web, playing a video game, or using the phone as an alarm clock in the late evening, they are probably keeping themselves from a restful night.



To improve your child's sleep, try these sleep tips:

- Make sleep a healthy priority in your family's busy schedule.
- Set appropriate and consistent bedtimes for yourself and your children, and stick to them.
- Know how your child is using electronics in the bedroom. Create a plan for appropriate use at night and set boundaries about use before and after bedtime.
- Educate yourself and your child on how light from electronic device screens can interfere with sleep.
- Talk to your child about the importance of sleep for health and well-being.
- Talk to your child's teacher(s) about your child's alertness during the day. Let your child's teacher(s) know that you want to be made aware of any reports of your child falling asleep in school.
- Remember that you are a role model to your child; set a good example.
- Create a sleep-supportive bedroom and home environment, dimming the lights prior to bedtime and controlling the temperature (in most cases, temperatures above 75 degrees and below 54 degrees Fahrenheit will disrupt sleep).
- Try to encourage activities such as reading or listening to music before bedtime instead of watching TV, playing video games or surfing the Web.
- Make sure children's activities, including homework, can be completed without interfering with bedtimes.

### If you want to read more about this topic:

- National Sleep Foundation: <https://sleepfoundation.org/>
- Stanford Medicine: <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2015/10/among-teens-sleep-deprivation-an-epidemic.html>
- Time. com: <http://time.com/3663796/for-better-grades-let-your-kids-sleep-more/>
- Healthysleep: <http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/need-sleep/whats-in-it-for-you/memory>
- Sleep Center UCLA: <http://sleepcenter.ucla.edu/sleep-and-teens>
- Sleep.org: <https://sleep.org/articles/ways-technology-affects-sleep/>