Anticipatory Guidance: Sleep

According to the National Sleep Foundation, teens need 8-10 hours of sleep; school-aged children need 9-11 hours; preschool need 10-13 hours; toddlers need 11-14 hours; infants need 12-15 hours; and newborns need 14-17. Media has been shown to affect sleep in children and adolescents, leading them to not getting enough quality sleep.

What the Evidence Says

Physical, emotional, social, and cognitive problems. A lack of sleep can lead to a variety of problems such as difficulties with learning, listening, concentrating, and solving problems (Seegers et al., 2016); anxiety and depression (Lemola, Perkinson-Gloor, Brand, Dewald-Kaufmann, & Grob, 2015); irritability (Konen, Dirk, Leonhardt, & Schmiedek, 2016); and unhealthy eating and weight gain (Sayin & Buyukinan, 2016).

Sleep onset latency and sleep disruption. The “blue light” from screens can disrupt the circadian rhythm (Figueiro & Overington, 2015). Notifications from mobile phone and tablets, whether audio or vibration notifications, can disrupt sleep (Adachi-Mejia, Edwards, Gilbert-Diamond, Greenough, & Olson, 2014). Watching violent or scary media before bed can also lead to sleep disruptions (Cantor, Byrne, Moyer-Gusa, & Riddle, 2010; Garrison, Liekweg, & Christakis, 2011). Using screens before bed can cause individuals to go to bed later, and not sleep as long (Hale & Guan, 2015; Pieters et al., 2014).

During the Visit

If your patient screens “positive” on the Media History Survey for sleep-related issues, discuss the problems with the patient and his/her family, and touch on how media may play a role in addressing or exacerbating these issues.

Recommendations

- Encourage adolescents to adopt a healthy sleep routine that does not include falling asleep listening to music, watching a video, or in the middle of an instant messaging conversation. Tell patients to avoid all screens (phones, tablets, video games, television) at least one hour before bed. Highlight the importance of creating a calm sleep atmosphere with a regular bedtime, even on weekends.
- Instruct patients to charge phones, tablets, and laptops outside of the bedroom overnight, and to keep TVs out of the bedroom (Falbe et al., 2015).
- If the patient is suffering from drowsiness, ensure that parents understand the dangers of sleep deprivation. For adolescent patients, this includes not driving when drowsy. When sleep deprived, an individual is as impaired as driving with a blood alcohol content of .08%, which is illegal for drivers in many states.
- If patients insist on using screen media before bed, advise them to turn on Night Shift Mode on an iOS device (iPhone or iPad), which changes the screen to a warmer color that is easier on the eyes. Similar apps on Android exist (Night Shift, Twilight).
- Ensure that the patient is getting enough exercise in order to get quality sleep (Lang et al., 2016).
Future Directions

Sleep is crucial for healthy development in youth. As technologies become more prevalent in our lives, it is important to understand the effects on sleep.

References


Van Den Bulck, J. (2007). Adolescent use of mobile phones for calling and for sending text messages after lights out: Results from a prospective cohort study with a one-year follow-up. Sleep, 30(9), 1220-1223.


