

Sleep

Sleep is a basic need of all of us, and teens seem to require lots of it! What with school, work, practice, and social obligations, many adolescents seem to be able to roll with it and perform as expected. Occasionally a student will come to the health office with the complaint of fatigue and inability to get to sleep or to have restorative sleep. Sometimes, teens will even try to gain sleep by taking over the counter medications or herbal remedies. These teens say they cannot focus in school and often fall behind in their other obligations as well. Sometimes they are referred by their teachers because they fall asleep during class or their grades are falling. A usually cheerful student might become easily distracted or quick to anger or tears.

In all of these situations a call is made to the parent or guardian with the suggestion that a health care practitioner be contacted to determine the cause, if it cannot be explained after the parent and teen examine the situation. Often there is a simple remedy such as curtailing some of the activities and concentrating on the important ones.

For a few others there may be a true sleep disorder. This diagnosis is made by the health care practitioner who is seeing the teen. Questions are asked concerning work habits, excessive computer, phone or TV time, substance abuse, diet, depression, anxiety, and sinus conditions, to name a few, which could cause interruptions to rest and inability to get to sleep and to stay asleep. Laboratory blood work may be ordered to rule out conditions like diabetes, heart or lung disease, or anemia.

Sometimes a health care practitioner will refer a teen-ager to a sleep clinic which will examine sleep patterns and measure brain activity to determine if there is an organic cause to sleeplessness. Most often there is a simple solution and the teenager will regain her/his cheerful, vibrant self with boundless energy.