

Teens lack of sleep an “epidemic”: Doctor

Sleep has always been a problem for teenagers but according to some physicians and epidemiologists¹, the issue is now enhanced² because of electronics and technology.

“The number of teens that go to bed with their cell phone under their pillow is something like 95 per cent,” says Dr. Leora Kuttner with the BC³ Children’s Hospital.

5 “It’s something that has to change.”

Dr. Kuttner’s comments were part of an assembly earlier today at Vancouver Technical School to help kick off their Sleep Week and a years-long initiative to build awareness of the importance of rest to succeed both in school and outside it.

10 The Vancouver school’s initiative comes after a University of British Columbia study in the spring of 2014 and another done this year that found no fewer than 70 per cent of kids saying they feel tired all the time.

“Last year’s wellness survey came back and Van Tech was worried about the lack of sleep the students were getting, and how you weren’t well rested,” says Van Tech student and sleep committee member Erin Scarr.

15 She says students are stressed about their marks, staying up late studying, using technology and generally not sleeping well.

“With our sleep committee we decided to change this... it’s time for students to take back control of their sleep.”

20 As Dr. Kuttner explains, sleep is a chance for regeneration and brain growth and “allows you to lay down memory tracks of all the work you did the previous day. So having sleep actually improves your memory retention⁴ the next day.”

UBC⁵’s wellness survey showed that teens are getting an average of two to three hours less sleep than they should. While they do catch up on sleep in holiday time, by November, December and January is when the full extent of their deprivation⁶ manifests in problems, says Dr. Kuttner.

25 Lack of sleep plays out in different ways – headaches, mood disorders, pain-related problems, making poor judgments, challenges with day-to-day tasks, more fidgety – and it negatively impacts the student’s academic achievements.

How much sleep is needed for teens? About nine hours, according to Dr. Osam Ipsiroglu with the UBC Department of Pediatrics.

¹ epidemiologer; forskere i sygdomme og helbredsforhold

² blevet større

³ British Columbia (delstat i Canada)

⁴ *memory retention*: huskeevne

⁵ University of British Columbia

⁶ (her) søvnmangel

30 “It might differ from teen to teen,” he says. “The main point is how do they get up and how refreshed are they when they get up?”

Physicians and epidemiologists say the lack of sleep in teenagers’ lives is an epidemic and sees it as a major problem. That’s why initiatives like Vancouver Tech’s Sleep Week elates⁷ Dr. Ipsiroglu.

“[I’m] thrilled the students are taking this on and I’m shocked that they have only five or six hours of sleep – this mirrors exactly what the problem is,” he says.

35 “In order not to miss [anything], they cut down on sleep time, which is the time for their brain to regenerate.”

While Drs. Kuttner and Ipsiroglu are happy to see the students taking a week to track their sleep as well as organizing activities to help students learn the importance of high-quality sleep, there’s still one more step.

40 “They’ll have a challenge getting to get their nine-and-a-half hours of sleep every night,” Dr. Kuttner, who believes sleep isn’t the priority for teens or their parents.

“We haven’t made it a priority. We’ve made homework a priority and [teens] have made getting back to their text messages a priority... Ideally it’s great for teenagers to take the initiative but parents have to get in there too and help make this the new [sleep] pattern.

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⁷ begeistrer