Later to rise, not earlier to bed, for today’s tired teens, doctors say

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff
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If you thought trying to get out of bed in time for school each morning was your own private struggle, you thought wrong.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has declared the chronic, frequent sleepiness of our nation’s teenagers to be a public health problem. As a possible solution, the AAP called for middle and high schools to push back their start times 30 minutes to an hour to allow students to get more rest.

In the 2011-12 school year, 43 percent of U.S. public high schools started before 8 a.m.

In a statement given on Monday, the AAP said that delaying school start times could help students get healthy amounts of sleep. In fact, research has shown that this change could help solve the problems caused by chronic sleep loss.

Sleep deprivation in teenagers is widespread. Eighty-seven percent of high school students in the U.S. are getting less than the recommended 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep each night. High school seniors get less than 7 hours of sleep at night, on average. The AAP reports that the average teenager in
the U.S. is often as tired as someone with narcolepsy, a disease that makes people so tired that they sometimes fall asleep uncontrollably.

**Biological Clock Versus School Clock**

Exhaustion among teens has serious consequences. Many teens fall asleep while attending class or doing homework because they are so tired. Teenage drivers are also in danger of getting into car accidents when they are tired. And, as many of us know from personal experience, being tired affects mood, attention, memory and behavior control.

Teens clearly suffer when they do not get enough sleep. So can’t they just go to bed earlier? The answer is: not really. At the beginning of adolescence, the body delays releasing melatonin, a hormone that tells the body that it is time to go to sleep. This makes it harder to fall asleep in the early evening. Researchers have also found that adolescents take longer to wind down after a long day than people in other stages of life.

“This research indicates that the average teenager in today’s society has difficulty falling asleep before 11 p.m.,” the AAP statement says.

Timothy Morgenthaler, president of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, agrees that this is a serious problem. “When high school classes begin early in the morning, we ask teens to shine when their biological clock tells them to sleep,” he said in a statement.

Studies have shown that a later school start time would help students get an additional hour of sleep per night, improve attendance rates, lower dropout rates, and even reduce the number of car crashes among adolescent drivers. Whether a later start time would also improve academic performance is still an open question.

The AAP acknowledges that it may be hard for schools to start later without creating scheduling problems. Nevertheless, the organization argues that schools should try to make the change.
Quiz

1. According to the studies conducted, which of the following is NOT certain?
   (a) an additional hour of sleep each night will improve concentration levels
   (b) an additional hour of sleep each night will improve attendance rates
   (c) lack of sleep increases chances of students getting into car accidents
   (d) lack of sleep affects mood, attention, memory and behavior control

2. Select the paragraph from the section “Biological Clock Versus School Clock” that explains why teenagers face difficulty sleeping in the early evening.

3. Select the sentence that DOES NOT support the central idea of the article.
   (a) The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has declared the chronic, frequent sleepiness of our nation’s teenagers to be a public health problem.
   (b) In a statement given on Monday, the AAP said that delaying school start times could help students get healthy amounts of sleep.
   (c) Many teens fall asleep while attending class or doing homework because they are so tired.
   (d) “This research indicates that the average teenager in today’s society has difficulty falling asleep before 11 p.m.,” the AAP statement says.

4. According to the article, teenagers suffer the MOST from which of the following?
   (a) falling asleep in the early evening
   (b) falling asleep after 11 p.m.
   (c) getting about 6 hours of sleep each night
   (d) getting about 8.5 hours of sleep each night
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