

CONCUSSIONS AND SLEEP

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, teens should sleep 8-10 hours a night, while younger children need even more sleep!

With their increasingly busy schedules, however, many high school students sleep far less, which increases their risk of illnesses and accidents, along with disruptions in mood, attention and learning.

Adequate sleep is essential for facilitating recovery from any illness or injury, especially concussion. Yet, not only is it hard to suddenly change ingrained sleep habits, the sudden decrease in physical activity can make it even harder for busy athletes to fall asleep, or to stay asleep, at night.

If your child is having trouble getting adequate sleep post-injury, consult with your health care provider, and consider the following tips:

NAPS: returning to school post-injury can be exhausting, and with no after-school sports, your child may want to nap instead. That's fine as long as they're still able to get the minimum 8-10 hours sleep at night but if not...

- Review the day's schedule and whether or not your child paced themselves adequately during the day – that is, did he/she take regular breaks as recommended throughout the day, or try to power through? Did they get all of the supports that they are supposed to to lighten their load and to minimize symptom increase during the day?
- Try encouraging a brief, leisurely walk to re-energize, instead.
- Keep naps short – no more than 30-60 minutes, if absolutely necessary, and especially after the first few days back in school

PRE-BEDTIME RELAXATION STRATEGIES: Try to begin wind-down routines a couple of hours before bedtime help the mind and body to relax, to make it easier to fall asleep when finally going to bed. Avoid exercise, caffeine, meals and sugar within hours of bedtime. Cramming in last-minute homework just before hitting the bed can make it harder to suddenly shut down, too, so do consider:

- warm beverages like tea, cider, or milk – but avoid anything with caffeine
- a warm bath or shower – not for vigorous playtime for younger children
- listening to a story read aloud – not just for younger children
- deep breathing and exercises for progressive muscle relaxation
- soothing music or relaxing nature sounds

BEDTIME:

- aim for the same bedtime and routines nightly, even on weekends, if aiming to improve sleep habits.
- turn off all electronics or put on airplane mode – no screens in bed, even on night settings or reduced brightness
- ideal sleep environments are dark quiet, cool, comfortable and relaxing. Enlist your family's support

GENERAL TIPS: Changing habits is hard, especially in the face of other major life changes like a concussion.

- If falling asleep earlier is a problem, aim for gradually moving back bed time a half hour or so every few days
- Avoid lying in bed awake for hours – if not asleep after a half hour or so, try getting up, drinking some warm milk, or maybe looking at a book or magazine for a short time, then trying it again, but avoid TV, computer and phone screens, even on night settings
- Discuss over-the-counter medications like Melatonin with your physician if sleep onset is a problem
- Use the bed just for sleeping, and not for mentally stimulating activities like homework