

June 2017 post: Sleep in Adolescents (by Stephanie Stockburger, MD, FAAP)

Case: You are seeing a 13-year-old male with his parents for a well adolescent visit. He has had increasing fatigue for the past few weeks and parents are concerned about mono. His grades have dropped from mostly B's to mostly C's. He is spending increasing time in his room playing video games after school and on the weekends. Parents report that he recently received his own smart phone as a birthday gift about a month ago. When asked about sleep, he states he usually goes to bed between 1-2 am and wakes up at 7:30 am. He denies sore throat or fever. Parents are requesting testing for mono and would also like to discuss an ADHD evaluation due to dropping grades, increasing inattention, and difficulty following through with tasks. In addition, teachers have recently contacted parents and voiced concern about his lack of focus at school and difficulty turning in assignments in a timely fashion. His physical exam is unremarkable except that he is tired-appearing.

What do you think will benefit this patient this most?

- A. Go ahead and test for mono
- B. Initiate ADHD evaluation by sending Vanderbilt home for parents and teachers
- C. Talk with your patient alone and inquire about substance use
- D. Screen him for depression and anxiety
- E. Discuss importance of avoiding screens for 1-2 hours prior to bedtime and initiate a discussion regarding removing screens from the bedroom

While you should definitely talk with this patient alone and inquire about substance use and screen for depression and anxiety, what would likely benefit him the most is a discussion about good sleep hygiene. **E** is the correct answer. Mononucleosis would be low on your differential without other symptoms. Prior to initiating an ADHD evaluation, it is imperative to inquire about sleep. Poor sleep can present like ADHD.

Most teenagers are very sleep deprived!

Adolescents need between 9 and 9 1/2 hours of sleep. They typically get between 7 and 7 1/4 hours. Teens may not get enough sleep due to biological shift in sleep schedule, early high school start times, social and school obligations (sports, homework, etc.)

Sleep deprivation may affect an adolescent's:

- mood: may cause teen to be moody, irritable, cranky
- behavior: sleep deprived teens are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors such as [substance use](#)
- cognitive ability: may have problems with attention, memory, decision making, reaction time, and creativity
- academic performance: sleep deprived adolescents are more likely to get poor grades, fall asleep in class, and have tardiness and absences
- ability to drive safely

How to help adolescents get more sleep:

- keep a regular sleep schedule
- avoid oversleeping on weekends
- turn off televisions, computers, and smartphones: [screens](#) engage both mental activity and the light exposure also promote wakefulness. Texts or alerts in the middle of the night may also wake an adolescent up from sleep.
- avoid caffeine, smoking, alcohol, and drugs

Check out this AAP article for more information!

Adolescents living the 24/7 Lifestyle: Effects of Caffeine and Technology on Sleep Duration and Daytime Functioning: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/6/e1005.abstract>