

Adolescents' use of cell phones after bedtime contributes to poor sleep

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The use of modern means of interpersonal and mass communication has become an essential part of being young. Technology has enabled two people to connect with each other virtually anywhere and at any time, a privilege that, according to new research, is often abused by youngsters and cutting into their sleep time. A study published in the September 1 issue of the journal SLEEP finds that cell phone use after bedtime is very prevalent among adolescents, and its use is related to increased levels of tiredness after one year.

The study, authored by Jan Van den Bulck, PhD, of the Leuven School for Mass Communication Research at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium, focused on 1,656 school children with an average age of 13.7 years in the youngest group and 16.9 years in the oldest group.

According to the results, only 38 percent of the subjects never used their cell phones after bedtime. Those using cell phones less than once a month increased the odds of being very tired one year later by 1.8. Those who used it less than once a week were 2.2 times more likely to be very tired. Using it about once a week increased the odds by 3.3, and those who used it more than once a week were 5.1 times more likely to be very tired. Overall, 35 percent of the cases of being very tired were attributed to the use of the cell phone. Use of the cell phone right after bedtime increased the odds of being very tired by 2.2. Between midnight and 3 a.m., the odds were 3.9 times higher, and in those who used it at any time of the night, the odds were 3.3 times higher.

“Parents often worry about the hazards of media use when they think about the time children spend watching TV or listening to music or surfing the Internet,” said Dr. Van den Bulck. “The mobile phone, on the other hand, is usually only seen as a simple communication device, useful in emergency situations. This study shows that parents should be aware of the fact that young people today use the modern means of communication in ways they probably cannot imagine. Communication and staying in touch are important for young people, and they now have the technology to stay ‘connected’ more or less permanently. Taking a mobile phone to your bedroom is not trivial. They spend a lot of time ‘connecting’ to other people, and some of them do this all hours of the night.”

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) offers the following tips for adolescents on how to get a good night’s sleep:

- Keep computers and TVs out of the bedroom. Do not stay up late to talk or text message on the cell phone or surf the Internet so as to cut into your sleep time
- Follow a consistent bedtime routine.
- Establish a relaxing setting at bedtime.
- Get a full night’s sleep every night.
- Avoid foods or drinks that contain caffeine, as well as any medicine that has a stimulant, prior to bedtime.
- Do not stay up all hours of the night to “cram” for an exam, do homework, etc. If after-school activities are proving to be too time-consuming, consider cutting back on these activities.

- Do not go to bed hungry, but don't eat a big meal before bedtime either.
- Avoid any rigorous exercise within six hours of your bedtime.
- Make your bedroom quiet, dark and a little bit cool.
- Get up at the same time every morning.

Experts recommend that adolescents get about 8-9 hours of sleep each night for good health and optimum performance. Parents who suspect that their teen might be suffering from a sleep disorder are encouraged to consult with their teen's pediatrician or a sleep specialist.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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