

Teen Sleep Deprivation And Its Effects On Teen Driving  
Scott P. Martin, Graduate Student  
St. Cloud State University

Sleep deprivation is a common problem for teens. As a result, teens – and especially young men - have a high risk of drowsy driving. Teens often fail to realize that their bodies need more sleep than adults. Although individual sleep needs varies, most adults need about seven to eight hours of sleep each night. But teens typically need a little more than nine hours of nightly sleep to feel alert and well rested during the day as cited by [schoolsleeducation.com](http://schoolsleeducation.com) (2013).

However, surveys show that most teens are getting less than eight hours of sleep on school nights. Some sleep for only five or six hours before starting another school day. This means that the average high school student misses about one to three hours of sleep on school nights. The result is a weekly sleep debt of five to 15 hours. Teens compensate for weekday sleep loss by sleeping in later on the weekends. This irregularity disrupts their body clock. As a result, it is even harder for them to fall asleep at night. This ongoing sleep loss can have a negative effect on the driving performance of teens. A study published in 2010, by the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* found that sleepiness at the wheel and poor sleep quality increased the risk of motor vehicle accidents in teens. Results show that teen drivers were twice as likely to have had a crash if they experienced sleepiness while driving or reported having bad sleep as cited by [schoolsleeducation.com](http://schoolsleeducation.com) (2013).

There are a variety of factors that cause teens to struggle with sleep deprivation. A biological change that occurs during adolescence causes teens to have a “delayed sleep phase.” There is a shift in the timing of their body clock that causes teens to feel sleepy later at night. During the teen years it can be hard to fall asleep before 10 or 11 p.m. as cited by [schoolsleeducation.com](http://schoolsleeducation.com) (2013).

Although this might seem like no big deal, sleep deprivation can have serious consequences. Tired teens can find it difficult to concentrate and learn, or even stay awake in class. Too little sleep also might contribute to mood swings and behavioral problems. Another major concern is drowsy driving, which can lead to serious — even deadly — crashes as cited by Mayo Clinic (2013).

A study published in 2011 by the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* found increased automobile crash rates among teen drivers who start school earlier in the morning. Another study published in 2008 by the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, found that the average crash rates for teen drivers dropped by 16.5 percent in a county that moved the high school start time one hour later. Multiple obligations also can compete for a teen’s limited time. As a result, sleep can be squeezed out of a teen’s busy schedule as cited by [schoolsleeducation.com](http://schoolsleeducation.com) (2013).

Few teens actually get enough sleep regularly, thanks to factors such as part-time jobs, early-morning classes, homework, extracurricular activities, social demands, and use

of computers and other electronic gadgets. More than 90 percent of teens in a recent study published in the Journal of School Health reported sleeping less than the recommended nine hours a night. In the same study, 10 percent of teens reported sleeping less than six hours a night as cited by Mayo Clinic (2013).

Today there also are numerous technological distractions that can keep teens awake at night. Multi-tasking teens may spend time watching TV or movies, playing video games, interacting online and talking or texting on a cell phone. A study published in 2009 by the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* found that teens used an average of four technological devices after 9 p.m. Teens who got plenty of sleep on school nights tended to do less technological multi-tasking after 9 p.m. as cited by schoolsleepeducation.com (2013).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, with some fairly simple choices (e.g. less screentime after 9 PM) and schedule changes (e.g. later school start times) made by teens, and for teens, that take into account their unique sleep cycle, we could help teens become more well rested, better learners, better drivers on the road ways, and reduce the number of vehicle crashes. I am not sure why we ignore the basic needs of sleep for teenagers, when it has proven that their sleep needs demand later bedtimes, and later wake up times too. If getting to school one hour later in the morning meant safer drivers, and more alert students, why aren't we making a change in our schools and their schedules? At a minimum each of us can take action to place the topic of sleep on our instructional agenda and become an advocate for better sleep for teens.

### References

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