

Objective

Students will assess their sleep quality and habits and identify one sleep improvement strategy to try for one week.

Materials

- Sleep Assessment and Improvement Plan handout, one per student
- For remote adaptation: Fast Facts About Sleep and Stress handout, one per student



Bold—Teacher's script

Italics—Anticipated student responses

Why This Matters Now

Stress can lead to changes in students' sleep quality and duration. But sleep is incredibly important for managing stress. In this activity, students learn about the relationship between sleep and stress and assess their sleep quality and habits. Then they learn strategies to improve their sleep and choose one to try out. This helps empower students to take control of their sleep as a way to manage stress.

Activity Instructions (25–30 min.)

1. Facilitate a discussion about sleep. Use the information below to help you.
 - Recommended hours of sleep:
 - **Raise your hand if you know how many hours of sleep you're supposed to be getting at your age.** Give students think-time. Invite a few students to respond.
 - **The American Psychological Association recommends that teens get between 8.5 and 9.25 hours of sleep per night. How close are you to the recommendation?** Notice students' responses.
 - Why sleep is important:
 - **Why is sleep important? What happens when we sleep?**
 - Your brain integrates new information with existing knowledge, making it stick.
 - Your body also repairs muscles and other cellular damage and restores your energy for the next day.
 - The effects of sleep deprivation on teens:
 - **How does a lack of sleep affect you?** Give students think-time. Invite a few students to share their ideas.
2. Relate their answers to what many teens report: Feeling more irritable, anxious, depressed, sad, and overwhelmed. Feeling sluggish or lazy. Poor memory and concentration. Slower response time. Poor food choices and weight gain. Family or social conflict due to irritability. Getting sick more often. Worse acne.

Activity Instructions (cont.)

3. How sleep and stress are related:
 - **How many of you have noticed this stressful period affecting your sleep?** Notice students' responses.
 - Discuss how stress affects sleep. **Stress means higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, in your system, which can make it harder to fall asleep or stay asleep. A lack of sleep lowers your threshold for stress, so you perceive more minor things as stressful. This increases your stress levels, making it harder to sleep. It's a vicious cycle!**
4. Introduce the activity. **So during periods of high stress, it's even more important to look at your sleep quality and habits and to make changes to help you sleep better. You're going to take a couple of quizzes about your sleep right now. Then you'll learn some strategies that'll help you sleep better and pick one to try for a week.**
5. Distribute the Sleep Assessment and Improvement Plan handout and go over it together. Ask students if they have any questions. Give students 10 minutes to complete the handout. Circulate and help students as needed.
6. Invite students to share. **Does anyone want to tell us which strategy they're going to try?** Facilitate a brief discussion about what students learned and what they plan to do to sleep better.
7. Reinforce. **Let's check in next week to see how your sleep improvement plan is going.** When you check in with students, encourage them to try a different strategy in addition to or instead of the one they tried.

Remote Adaptation

- Email the Fast Facts about Sleep and Stress handout and Sleep Assessment and Improvement Plan handouts home and have students read and complete them at home on their own. If they can't print the handouts, have students record their responses on a sheet of paper.
- At your next remote meeting, have students discuss what they learned about sleep and what they plan to do to sleep better.

Please Give Us Feedback

After you've tried out this activity, help us make a better product for educators by taking a quick survey. Access the survey by visiting the link, or scan the QR code with your phone's camera. <https://tinyurl.com/yyxz92fr>



Fast Facts About Sleep and Stress

Sleep is very important for your health and well-being, especially during adolescence, when your brain and body are developing rapidly. When you sleep, your brain integrates new information with existing knowledge, making it stick. It's also when your body repairs muscles and other cellular damage and restores your energy for the next day.

When you don't get enough sleep, stress hormone levels increase in your body, making you feel wired, edgy, and, well, more stressed! It can lower your threshold for stress, which means you'll interpret minor things as *more* stressful than if you were rested. Most teens report sleeping less than the recommended 8.5–9.25 hours per night. They say they're sleeping more like 7 hours on a school night and 8 on a nonschool night. And about a quarter of teens say their sleep quality is fair or poor.

What happens when you don't get enough sleep? Here's what teens notice:

- Feeling more irritable, anxious, depressed, sad, and overwhelmed
- Feeling sluggish or lazy
- Poor memory and concentration
- Slower response time
- Poor food choices and weight gain
- Family or social conflict due to irritability
- Getting sick more often
- Worse acne

So a lack of sleep feeds the stress cycle, but it works the other way, too. Being stressed also affects your sleep. It can make it harder to fall asleep or stay asleep. So during periods of high stress, it's even more important to take a look at your sleep quality and habits, and to make changes to help you sleep better. Getting a good night's rest will help you get through these stressful times.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Quiz 1—Your Sleep Quality

Instructions: Read each statement and circle the response that best applies to you.

Since the current crisis . . .	Never/ Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
I'm getting less sleep.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm waking up a lot.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm taking naps or longer naps.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm going to bed and waking up at irregular times.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm feeling more agitated or amped up before bed.	1	2	3	4	5

Add up the numbers you circled and write your total here: _____

Quiz 2—Your Sleep Habits

Instructions: Read each statement and circle the response that best applies to you.

Since the current crisis . . .	Never/ Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
I'm using my phone, computer, or other devices with blue lights before bed more than I used to.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm drinking more caffeinated drinks.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm eating closer to bedtime.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm exercising less during the day.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm doing more in bed that's not sleep-related (for example, studying).	1	2	3	4	5

Add up the numbers you circled and write your total here: _____

Make a Plan to Sleep Better

If your total on either quiz was over 20, then sleep is likely having a big effect on your stress levels right now. There are four strategies you can do to sleep better. Read about each strategy and why it helps. Then pick one to try for a week.

1. **Strategy 1: Say goodnight to screens an hour before you go to bed.**

- **What it looks like:** Turn off all electronic devices and, if possible, move them out of your room for the night.
- **Why do it:** Maybe you've heard of the "blue light" that electronics emit? Well, it suppresses your brain's ability to release melatonin, a hormone that signals your body that it's time to sleep. Teenagers already release melatonin later in the evening than children or adults, so unplugging early is even more important for your sleep quality.

2. **Strategy 2: Cut way back on caffeine.**

- **What it looks like:** Reduce your caffeine consumption, especially before bed. And eliminate caffeinated drinks designed to keep you awake.
- **Why do it:** Your body can take hours to process caffeine fully. Even if you can fall asleep after drinking a caffeinated beverage, the stimulant effect makes it less likely you'll get a deep, restful sleep.

3. **Strategy 3: Move more during the day.**

- **What it looks like:** Aim for at about 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. It doesn't have to be all at once! Break it up throughout the day into shorter bursts of activity.
- **Why do it:** Aside from the obvious health benefits, exercise helps lower your stress hormone levels so you can get to sleep more easily and sleep more deeply.

4. **Strategy 4: Make your sleep time regular.**

- **What it looks like:** Decide on a regular time to go to bed and to wake up. Try not to vary it too much on the weekend. Avoiding naps during the day can help you stick to the regular bedtime. A bedtime routine can also help. It usually includes a time to unplug (see Strategy 1 above!), preparation for the next day (think picking out an outfit or packing your backpack), or a relaxing activity (for example, stretching, reading, or listening to relaxing music).
- **Why do it:** When something is a routine or habit, you're more likely to do it! And the body works best when it has a steady, consistent rhythm.

What's your pick? Write down which sleep improvement strategy you want to try for one week:



Reflect and Adjust

After one week, reflect on how it went. Did you use your strategy most days? Did it help you sleep better? Do you feel a little less stressed? Do you want to try another one?
