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Sleep expert and author, 'Beauty Sleep: Look Younger, Lose Weight and Feel Great Through Better Sleep'

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Teen Sleep Problems: Could Texting and E-Mailing Be to Blame?

As if we really needed anything else affecting a teen's mood and sleep, recent research shows that Internet use and texting can have a serious, detrimental effect on both sleep and mood. At a conference in Canada, U.S. researchers explained that more than half of kids and teens who text or surf the Internet:

- Have problems falling asleep (77.5 percent)
- Have trouble staying asleep -- all participants reported being woken up at least once per night by an electronic device
- Experience mood, behavior and cognitive problems during the day including ADHD, anxiety, depression and some learning difficulties

The study showed that on average, a teenager sends a total of 3400 electronic message per month -- that is more than 100 per day! When exactly are they in school? And here was the kicker: the author of the study, Dr. Peter Polos, said that on average, kids were texting or e-mailing 33.5 times per night to more than three different people (3.7)! And these electronic messages would occur anywhere from 10 minutes to four hours after the child's bedtime!

While this is not the first time I have written about this topic, the data in this study are pretty amazing. What can a concerned parent do? Here are three tips:

1) Education is key: letting children know how the use of these electronic devices can affect their sleep and their performance the next day is critical in giving them the tools to monitor their own behavior.

2) Set an electronic curfew: One hour before bed, kids need to turn off all the electronic devices that they normally use and participate in the Power Down Hour™:

- Twenty minutes of finishing up things to be done for tomorrow: getting clothes ready, packing up their backpack for school, etc.
- Twenty minutes for hygiene: nighttime bath, shower, brushing teeth, washing face, etc. Remember to do this in a dimly lit environment.
- Twenty minutes for a relaxation ritual: reading a book with a parent, saying nighttime prayers, spending time talking with a parent about their day, etc.

3) Have the device in question out of reach: Charge cell phones in a special room, and computers can be turned off or placed on a timer.

Yes, the information superhighway is a great tool for education and communication, and yes, cell phones can keep us in touch with our friends and loved ones, but when these devices begin to invade our sleeping world, as parents we need to adjust access for our kid's better health. And parents, we can take a tip and apply these rules to ourselves, as well; my guess is that our sleep and mood are also affected by nighttime e-mailing and texting.

Sweet dreams,
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