

My Teen Won't Get Out of Bed:

7 Reasons Why and 10 Ways

Parents Can Help

It's not unusual for parents of teens to feel trapped in a recurring nightmare each morning—a cycle of helpless frustration when your teen won't get out of bed and off to school. They don't hear their alarm (even when the rest of the house does). Your gentle reminders of the time fall on deaf ears. And somehow you become the villain as **tensions escalate** and your teen finally stumbles out the door in a stupor.

Summer vacation offers some relief from this battle, but it is often replaced by new concerns. What if my son sleeps all day long without the structure of school? Will sleeping all summer cause my daughter lasting harm? Understanding the reasons why a teen won't get out of bed is the first step in helping them develop a good summer routine. You can work *with* your child's biology, not against it, and find ways to get them out from under the covers. It's also important to learn to distinguish a typical heavy sleeping teen from one with a more serious physical or mental health problem.

Know the Facts: Nearly three-quarters of adolescents don't get the amount of sleep they need, according to the CDC.

Here are some of the most common reasons why a teen won't get out of bed.

1. Making Up for a Sleep Debt

A teen's need for sleep is generally high, given all the physical changes their brains and bodies are undergoing at a time of increasing demands on their time from school, work, and extracurriculars. And vast numbers of teens are simply **not getting all the sleep they need**. The **American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends** that teens should get 8–10 hours of sleep a night, depending on individual needs. However, a **CDC report** finds that 73 percent of surveyed high school students regularly fall short.

"Sleep debt"—the difference between the amount of sleep a person needs and the amount of sleep they get—is cumulative. That means that even a small nightly deficit will add up over time. Research has demonstrated that it takes nine days of unrestricted sleep to recover from a habitual sleep debt of just one hour a day. So if your teen won't get out of bed for the first week or two of summer vacation, it may be their body's way of trying to recover missed sleep.

2. A Shift in Sleep Hormones

“My 13-year-old son sleeps all the time!” is a common complaint among parents who might have thought they had left sleep battles behind with preschool. Starting around age 11, the body begins producing melatonin (the hormone that triggers sleep) later and later in the day. By high school, it is practically impossible for many teens to fall asleep until midnight or later. The delay in melatonin production shifts the entire sleep cycle later. That makes it equally difficult for a teen to wake up in time for the early start of most high school schedules. Boys often experience a more extreme shift than girls, leading to parental complaints of a son who sleeps all day and is up all night. This shift peaks around age 20. Some experts consider the return to earlier melatonin production and an earlier sleep time as a marker of the end of adolescence.

Furthermore, the sleep phase delay that is a natural part of adolescence can lead to the infuriating challenge of trying to wake a heavy sleeping teen. We cycle through four stages of sleep several times a night, each cycle lasting around 100 minutes. It is very difficult to wake someone during Stage 3 “deep sleep,” and they often awaken groggy and disoriented. A teen who has not fallen asleep until late at night will be hard to rouse if they are still in a deep sleep phase by morning. And if your teen has a sleep debt (as most teens do), their body will naturally attempt to spend more time in Stage 3 deep sleep.

3. Social Jetlag: Sleep Cycles vs. Everyday Life

Healthy sleep is not just a matter of how much sleep a person gets, but when sleep occurs. Circadian rhythm is a 24-hour cycle that drives sleeping and waking. The hormones that trigger sleeping (melatonin) and waking (cortisol and adrenaline) are associated with exposure to darkness and light.

In addition to those environmental cues, we each have our own “master clock” influenced by genetics, age, and gender. Our master clock determines our chronotype—the tendency to be an early bird, a night owl, or somewhere in between. If your teenager won’t wake up in the morning, they may be experiencing “social jetlag”—when your chronotype is out of alignment with the timing of your everyday activities. Social jetlag is especially common among teens. Their biology makes them night owls, but they’re living in an early bird world.

4. Could a Heavy Sleeping Teen Have Depression?

If a teenager won't wake up in the morning or lies around in bed all day, they might be struggling with depression. In some cases, a depressed teen may truly be oversleeping, known as hypersomnia. However, insomnia (difficulty falling or staying asleep) is a far more common symptom of depression than oversleeping. If a teen has insomnia due to depression, they may appear to be oversleeping as they try to catch up after a wakeful night. It can also be hard to find the motivation to get out of bed when you're depressed, even if you're not actually sleeping.

The relationship between sleep and depression goes both ways. Sleeping all day can be one of the **symptoms of depression**, or it can be a trigger for depression, particularly if a teen is already vulnerable. One reason is the **importance of sleep for emotional regulation**. A well-rested mind is better able to cope with life stressors in a healthy way. Moreover, if a teen spends the day sleeping instead of doing other things—like physical activity, engaging with family and friends, or developing life skills—that can be a risk factor for depression.

Even if a teen isn't suffering from clinical depression, they may be experiencing **languishing**. Rather than the full-blown hopelessness and despair of depression, languishing is a state of stagnation, emptiness, and lack of motivation. That can kill a teen's desire to get out of bed even if they've had plenty of sleep.

5. When Anxiety Is the Reason a Teen Won't Get Out of Bed

An **anxiety disorder** may be another reason why a teenager can't get out of bed in the morning. Anxiety can cause insomnia when constant worrying prevents a teen from falling asleep. Or anxious hypervigilance can make it hard for them to stay asleep through the night. They may also be staying in bed in an attempt to avoid a situation that triggers their fears. Social anxiety can keep a teen up at night if they know they will be in a social situation the next day. During summer, that might be camp, a summer job, or even a get-together with extended family.

As with depression, it goes both ways. Insomnia can be a symptom of anxiety, as described above. Or it can contribute to the onset of anxiety by impairing a teen's ability to cope skillfully with challenging moments throughout their day.

6. Tech Addiction

Whether it's staying up late at night scrolling through **social media** or getting sucked into the next level of a **video game**, nighttime technology use is bad news for teen sleep (and for getting out of bed the next morning). The connection between **technology and sleep deprivation in teens** adds a new layer of challenge to the realities of teen biology faced by every generation of parents. Moreover, parents are not likely to be awake themselves to monitor it.

Even if a teen's natural sleep-wake cycle has shifted later, they still require nighttime sleep and daytime exposure to sunlight to support a range of biological functions and good mental health. Sleep deprivation due to technology overuse can start a vicious cycle. A tired brain is more prone to addiction, depression, and anxiety.

7. Substance Abuse

Drug or alcohol abuse may be a reason a teen won't get out of bed in the morning. Stimulants like cocaine and amphetamines obviously interfere with the sleep-wake cycle. They can disrupt sleep for months after regular use has stopped. But **depressants** and sedatives, including alcohol and marijuana, also contribute to sleep deprivation. Although they may initially make someone sleepy, it is a lower quality of sleep with less time in restorative deep sleep.

As with **anxiety and depression in adolescence**, the relationship between sleep deprivation and substance abuse goes both ways. Drug or alcohol use interferes with sleep, and sleep deprivation makes it more likely a teen will turn to a substance—as a sleep aid, as an alertness boost, or because lack of sleep has lowered their inhibitions and derailed self-control.

10 Tips for When Your Teen Won't Get Out of Bed

Try the following teen hacks to help your teen avoid sleeping all summer. Building a good summer routine will carry over into the school year as well, making those fall mornings a little bit easier on everyone.

Encourage good sleep hygiene.

There's no way around it. The conventional wisdom teens hate to hear—turn off screens an hour before you need to fall asleep—is essential for good sleep. The light from screens further inhibits melatonin production, already delayed in teens. Late-night screen use also exposes teens to **a range of other risk factors** for sleep deprivation and mental health problems. Oversleeping can be as disruptive to human biology as undersleeping. Try to maintain a weekend or summer sleep schedule within an hour or two of the normal routine.

Help them to avoid early-morning commitments and schedule activities later in the day.

Remember that most teens' natural chronotype does not support early morning activity. You may not be able to do anything about school start times, but you can help by scheduling appointments later in the day or asking them to help with evening chores rather than morning ones. Support them in scheduling work commitments or meetups with friends in the later morning so they have a reason to get up and going.



Harness technology for good to wake up your heavy sleeping teen.

As knowledge about sleep has increased, so have inventions designed to capitalize on that knowledge. Consider using an alarm clock that gradually lights up to simulate the effect of dawn. Or investigate a smart app that uses the sounds of breathing to sense when your teen is in a sleep stage that will be easier to wake from.

Educate them about the costs of staying in bed all day.

Teens probably don't realize why they have so much trouble getting out of bed. Understanding the natural physiological and hormonal reasons can help them take ownership over their behavior. Teens don't like to be controlled by anything—even their own biology. And learning the consequences of poor sleeping habits and physical inactivity may also inspire them to get up and moving.

Find a wake-up buddy.

Capitalize on a teen's social instinct to help motivate them to get out of bed. Perhaps they have a friend struggling with the same issue. Or maybe they can develop a regular breakfast or lunch routine with a favorite relative. Does a neighbor have any furry friends who need some morning attention?

Help them find ways to get active outdoors.

Outdoor activity delivers a number of healthy-sleep benefits simultaneously. Exposure to sunlight early in the day influences the timing of melatonin production later. Even urban plants and trees deliver the **mental health benefits of nature**. And physical activity helps bring on tiredness come bedtime. Even if an outing isn't particularly active, it can still deliver on the first two benefits—think hammocking with a friend or lounging on a blanket in a park.

Know the Facts: Time in nature lowers production of the stress hormone cortisol and helps regulate the nervous system.

Remind them to reconnect with sources of joy.

Did your teen use to love painting or dancing, surfing or playing softball? Summer is a great time to rediscover hobbies and talents that may have fallen away over the last few years, due to pandemic restrictions, a heavier homework load, or increased time online. Help them find a class, get the materials they need, or sign up for a neighborhood team.



Identify expectations and consequences.

Setting a few simple boundaries can help a teen get up and moving at a reasonable hour. Work with them to establish a time when they should be out of bed. Create a goal or chore associated with it, like walking the dog or FaceTiming if you're at work. Establish consequences if goals aren't reached. For example, if they can't get out of bed at the agreed-upon time, their curfew moves earlier by the same amount of time.

Offer compassionate support when your teen won't get out of bed.

Let your teen know you're there for them, without judgment. Try open-ended questions like, "How can I help?" or "What would make it easier for you to get out of bed?" Make sure they know you don't think they're lazy or purposely trying to defy you, and that your concern is for their health and well-being.

Get professional assessments.

If education and lifestyle changes aren't making a difference, it's time to access more support. When considering professional help for when a teen won't get out of bed, it's important to rule out any possible **sleep disorders**. If there are no biological reasons why a teenager won't wake up in the morning, the next step is to explore whether mental health issues are impacting their behavior.

Accessing Help for When a Teen Won't Get Out of Bed

If a teen's sleep and other summertime behaviors are revealing potential mental health disorders, it's important to take action immediately. These issues typically don't get better on their own, so don't rely on the return of the fall schedule to put things to rights. More likely, fall will bring a new set of stressors for teens who are already struggling. Seeking mental health support through your medical provider and/or schools can help teens heal depression, anxiety, trauma, and self-destructive behaviors like tech addiction or substance abuse.

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