

FACT: Canadian kids are not getting enough sleep!

BY RACQUEL FORAN

If the title of this article caught your attention, then we have done what we intended. We want to wake our readers up to the fact that they are sleep deprived and it is having a negative impact on their health and well-being.

For the first time in 2016, the *ParticipAction Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* took a close look at the relationship between sleep and physical activity. The report gives the sleep indicator a grade of B because well over half of children and youth meet the new Canadian sleep recommendations. On the surface this might appear to be a relatively good grade, but upon closer examination, it is clear there is a lot of room for improvement.

The new Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines recommend that children between the ages of five and 13 get between nine and 11 hours of sleep per night; youth between the ages of 14 and 17 should get eight to ten hours a night. Studies show however, that 21 per cent of children and 28 percent of youth are not getting the recommended amount of sleep. Thirty-three per cent of children, and 45 per cent of youth have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep at least some of the time. And 36 per cent of 14- to 17-year-olds sometimes find it difficult to stay awake during the day.

Additionally, those who are getting enough hours of sleep might not be getting a good sleep. Cutting your hours of sleep short to accommodate extracurricular activities and homework during the week, and then oversleeping on the weekends to make up for it doesn't have the same restorative impact on the body as having a regular, consistent sleep schedule.

Why does this matter? Because more and more research is showing that lack of sleep threatens the academic

success, health, and safety of our children and youth. The ParticipAction report references a recent review that included 592,215 children and youth from 40 different countries. The review concluded that short sleep duration was associated with excess body weight, poorer emotional regulation and academic achievement, and lower quality of life/well-being. Sleep deprivation impacts people differently. It can lead to hyperactivity, short attention span, and impulsiveness. Problem solving and verbal creativity can be a struggle. Sleep also impacts hormone levels, and a lack of it has been associated with increased risk of obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure.

The report also notes that sleep, physical activity, and sedentary behaviour have interactive relationships. For example, being physically active promotes good sleep, whereas excessive screen time can disrupt sleep. And, being tired from lack of sleep can reduce physical activity levels, which in turn is associated with increased screen time in children. Put another way, those who spend the day running around, sleep better, and those who sleep better have more energy to run around.

The good news is that there are ten easy steps you can take immediately to improve your sleep health.

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- Expose yourself to bright sunlight (or light) first thing in the morning
- Avoid caffeine (soda, coffee, tea, chocolate) after noon
- Exercise during the day
- Ensure your bedroom is in sleep mode: dark, quiet, and cool
- Have a comfortable mattress and pillow



- Avoid going to bed hungry, but also don't eat heavy meals right before bedtime
- Develop a relaxing bedtime routine: reading, meditation, bathing, soft music
- Turn off cell phones, tablets, computers, and televisions (if possible, make your bedroom technology-free)
- Don't have pets in your bedroom

Getting a regular good night's sleep is only one part of living a healthy life, but it is an important one. Having a restored and refreshed body and mind will go a long way to helping you succeed in dance, school, and work. Don't deprive yourself!

To read the complete *ParticipAction Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* visit participaction.com/en-ca/thought-leadership/report-card/2016.

To learn more about the new Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines visit participaction.com/en-ca/thought-leadership/benefits-and-guidelines/5-17