

If kids snooze, they win...

by Kathleen Fackelmann
Gannett News Service

Getting just a little more sleep every night can help a child do better on memory and attention tests, a new study says.

The finding comes amid other research suggesting that the modern world's 24/7 approach to life has left Americans, including children, with a chronic sleep debt. The study's findings, if verified by additional research, suggest kids who get even a modest increase in sleep may get a big bonus in skills that translate to better grades.

Avi Sadeh, a sleep researcher at Tel Aviv University in Israel, and his colleagues knew that adults suffering from sleep deprivation often performed poorly on memory and attention tests, but not much research had been done with kids. So Sadeh and colleagues recruited 77 kids in the fourth and sixth grades.

The kids averaged less than nine hours of sleep per night, an amount most researchers believe is sub par for their age. Most doctors recommend children get between nine and 11 hours of sleep a night.

Researchers gave the kids standard memory and attention tests. Then half the kids went to bed an hour earlier, and the rest went to bed an hour later than their usual times. Kids kept these sleep hours for three days and retook the tests.

Kids sent to bed an hour earlier got about 40 extra minutes of sleep a night. But that modest amount had an impact: They performed significantly better on tasks that required sustained attention and the ability to remember new information. Improvement was equivalent to a fourth grader performing at the fifth-grade level, researchers say. In contrast, kids who had less sleep either lost ground or did the same on the tests.

The study is published in the journal *Child Development*.

Kids come up with all kinds of reasons to stay up later, Sadeh says. But this study suggests parents should consider an earlier bedtime, particularly if the child shows signs of sleep deprivation such as crankiness or sleeping late on weekends.

DRS. OZ AND ROIZEN by Michael Roizen, M.D., and Mehmet Oz, M.D.

The 19th-century lullaby "Rock-a-bye baby, in the tree top," hardly promotes a peaceful night's rest when it tells a child to expect that the wind will pick up, "and down will come baby, cradle and all."

It's a good thing we choose gentler tunes. (How about a collection of Beatles songs, all done as lullabies?) Children who don't hit the hay at (more or less) the same time every night and for the same number of hours often fall behind in reading, math and spatial awareness by age 7. Irregular bedtimes disrupt

body rhythms and undermine the brain's ability to take in and retain information. Three-year-olds seem most negatively affected. A study of 11,000 children found that kids at that age with poor sleep habits were the most disadvantaged intellectually in the first years of grade school. Erratic sleep patterns also trigger weight gain, difficulty controlling emotions and, suggest some doctors, the misdiagnosis of ADHD.

So if your toddler or preschooler isn't following a regular sleep schedule, here's what you can do:

1. Let your child get lots of physical exercise daily. It's vital for mental and physical health, plus it promotes sleep!
2. Turn off the TV and all handheld devices at least two hours before bedtime, and keep all such devices out of your child's sleeping area.
3. Set a "heading to sleep" routine: Take a bath; put on PJs; read books; then lights out.
4. Encourage your child to sleep in his/her own bed; it also promotes good sleep patterns.

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