TIPS FOR TEENAGERS
With exam time approaching, Dr Murray shares some tips on how to improve sleep during adolescence.

During the day
1. Get outside during the day, preferably early in the morning, but lunchtime will do.
2. Get some exercise each day, but finish your exercise at least three hours before bedtime because elevated body temperature is a barrier to sleep.
3. Avoid napping.
4. Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate), nicotine and other stimulants after noon.

Around bedtime
1. Aim for 8.5 to 9.25 hours of sleep a night.
2. Choose a bedtime that works for you, and go to bed at this time each night.
3. If at the drinking age, avoid alcohol — although it makes us sleepy, it shortens and disrupts sleep.
4. Avoid overstimulation later in the evening — intense study, computer games, arguing or heated discussions are incompatible with sleep.
5. Develop a soothing pre-sleep routine to train the body into a relaxed state for bed — try a warm bath, a quiet read, camomile tea, or a relaxation technique in the hour before bed.
6. Create a good sleeping space that is dark, comfortable, cool, quiet and uncontactable, which means no mobile phones and no Internet.
7. Avoid bright light in the evening — screens, especially computer screens at close range, tell the body clock that it is not yet dark.
8. If you have any worries or concerns at bedtime, write them down for consideration in the morning.
9. If you are not asleep 20 minutes after lights out, get up and do something quiet until you feel tired.

In the morning
1. Open blinds or turn on lights as soon as you get up — the body clock benefits from a ‘light reminder’ that the day has started.

Catch-up sleep
1. Weekend sleep-ins are OK, but do not awaken more than two to three hours later than your usual awakening time or it could disrupt the body clock.

Is poor sleep a problem for you?
1. Effective, practical strategies exist for treating most sleep problems. If your sleep quality is consistently poor or is causing distress, you should seek professional assistance.
2. For more information about managing sleep and beating stress in adolescence, visit the Swinburne Psychology Clinic website.

www.swinburne.edu.au/iss/psychology/ps/
Parents can stop panicking about the impact they have on their offspring's brain — a child's grey matter develops in spite of mum and dad's input.

That's the strong belief of US neuroscientist Dr Sam Wang, who recently co-authored a book called Welcome To Your Child's Brain (OneWorld Publications).

"[Children's brains] start with their own predispositions, they seek their own experiences, and they develop their own preferences," Dr Wang says. "Which is actually a good thing because it makes them remarkably resilient."

Here are some of Dr Wang's fascinating findings:

**+ SKIP THE TV AND DVDs**
Dr Wang is adamant babies should not watch TV or DVDs before the age of two. "At this age, television slows language acquisition. Children's brains are social learners, and television is a passive experience," he says. "A far better experience is anything involving a live person."

**+ BRAINS ARE HUNGRY**
"It's phenomenal — the growing brain is like a furnace," Dr Wang says. "A full half of the energy a child consumes in food goes to power and grow his or her brain."

**+ A WORK IN PROGRESS**
While the teen brain may have reached 95 per cent of adult volume, parents can't expect their teens to be making adult decisions. "The brain develops from back to front, and the front-most parts include areas important for impulse control and planning ahead, areas in which adolescents are notably not quite there," Dr Wang says.

**+ BUILD ON THE DRA MA**
Forget the brain-building power of music — which is "modest" at best, Dr Wang says. "Drama classes build the ability to imagine what another person is thinking," he says, "so they can help grow brain capacities for understanding other people."

**+ SURVIVAL, NOT ALGEBRA**
A kid's brain is optimised for rapid solutions to everyday problems — less suited to solving a maths problem than deciding whether to punch a kid who insults them, Dr Wang says. "It's not surprising some children have trouble with reading, or with staying still for hour-long classes."