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TIPS FOR TEENAGERS

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

During the day

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

Around bedtime

- ☒ Aim for 8.5 to 9.25 hours of sleep a night
- ☒ Choose a bedtime that works for you, and go to bed at this time each night
- ☒ If at the drinking age, avoid alcohol – although it makes us sleepy, it shortens and disrupts sleep
- ☒ Avoid overstimulation later in the evening – intense study, computer games, arguing or heated discussions are incompatible with sleep
- ☒ 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
- ☒ Create a good sleeping space that is dark, comfortable, cool, quiet and uncontactable, which means no mobile phones and no Internet
- ☒ Avoid bright light in the evening – screens, especially computer screens at close range, tell the body clock that it is not yet dark
- ☒ If you have any worries or concerns at bedtime, write them down for consideration in the morning
- ☒ If you are not asleep 20 minutes after lights out, get up and do something quiet until you feel tired

In the morning

- ☒ 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

- ☒ 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?

- ☒ 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.
- ☒ For more information about managing sleep and beating stress in adolescence, visit the Swinburne Psychology Clinic website, www.swinburne.edu.au/lss/psychology/pc/

The Inspiration Room

www.theinspirationroom.com

We all need a dose of inspiration from time to time so interrupt the daily grind with a deep breath and a visit to this site that features designs, videos, photos and illustrations from leading artists and creatives in Australia and around the globe. Under Featured Inspirations it lists Showreels, Graphic Design, Commercials, Illustration and more. The site accepts "inspirational" submissions, subject to peer review.

WikiSky

www.wikisky.org

You don't have to be an astronomy buff to appreciate this stargazing site and its ambitions to detail and map the universe with high-resolution images of stars, swirling galaxies, comets and gorgeous nebulas. WikiSky covers more than half a billion astronomical objects and, as the Wiki name suggests, users can update the growing knowledge and visual database.

Mind over matter

meditation.org.au

If you can't go on holiday to de-stress, take a (healthy) mind trip instead, grasshopper. This non-denominational group has an online

meditation course with podcasts of guided meditation exercises. The course, all downloads and membership are free. There's even a user-rated directory of other meditation courses conducted across Australia and a children's meditation section.

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parenting

bodyandsoul.com.au

Can diet affect a child's brain power? Visit bodyandsoul.com.au

WITH
FIONA BAKER

KIDS' BRAINS EXPLAINED

A new book says parents have limited influence on a child's personality and learning

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* (Newworld 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."

+ 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.

+ 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."

+ 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."

+ BUILD ON THE DRAMA
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."



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