

# THE SLEEP CHALLENGE

from

# GENERATION SLEEPLESS



Why **TWEENS** and **TEENS**  
Aren't Sleeping Enough and How  
**WE CAN HELP THEM**

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## THE SLEEP CHALLENGE: YOUR ORGANIZING TOOL

We sure do know a whole lot about sleep, but what we don't know are all the details of your life in particular. What time do your classes start? How long is your commute and do you ride the bus, walk, ride your bike, or ride in a car? How much time does it take to get home from school, do your homework, and complete any jobs or after-school activities you have? What is important to you—good grades, being in shape, helping your family, feeling positive and energetic? This Sleep Challenge tool is a way for you to personalize what you've learned, write down your own information, and create routines, timing, and goals to motivate you. We know from experience working with clients that having a comprehensive plan and visualizing our motivations for change is key.

It's important to read chapter 6 so that you understand the underlying mechanisms of the five sleep habits and the concepts of paleo-sleep and the sleep bubble. The Sleep Challenge in this chapter is solely focused on helping you put all you've learned together into your own unique plan. You may choose to take the steps of the Sleep Challenge on your own, with a friend, with your family, your class, or an athletic team. It's a great idea to do it together so you can brainstorm and troubleshoot, check in and hold one another accountable. Whether it's with family, friends, or on your own, remember you are committing to prioritizing your sleep, rather than letting it get shuffled to the bottom of the list. You're moving from a sleep-comes-last to a sleep-forward mentality.





## STEP ONE: THE SETUP

The first step is to answer the following questions so you get a baseline on your quantity and quality of sleep. You'll identify what's getting in your way, and you'll lay out the reasons why (read: motivation!) you want to get better sleep. This is to assess where you are. Don't overthink these questions. Answer them without worrying or judging yourself.

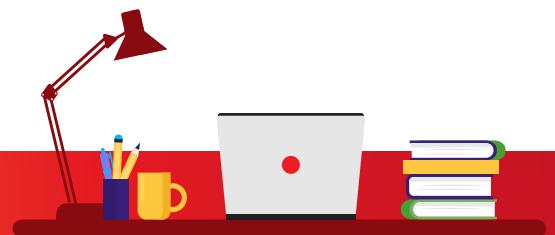
### MEASURE YOUR SLEEP AND SLEEPINESS

Write down the amount of sleep you get during an average week, based on the time you fall asleep and what time you wake up. The time you fall asleep is likely an estimate, since most of us don't know exactly. If it changes between weekend and weekday, note that too.

Most weeknights I sleep from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, total sleep time: \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday nights I sleep from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, total sleep time: \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday nights I sleep from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, total sleep time: \_\_\_\_\_



As a reminder, here's how much sleep, in hours, we need:

Little kids (2–6): 12–13

Big kids (7–11): 10–12

Adolescents (12–18): 9–10 (Remember, 8–8.5 may be *adequate* and  
9–10 is *optimal*)

Adults: 7–9

Next, if your sleep times are lower than the recommended range, or if there is more than one hour of difference between your weeknight and weekend sleep time, note this.

I need \_\_\_\_\_ more sleep each night

I sleep \_\_\_\_\_ more on the weekends or vacations

(Sleeping one to two hours more on the weekend versus the weeknights indicates sleep debt during the week and contributes to social jet lag.)

Which of these statements do you agree with?

\_\_\_ I find it hard to wake up and get out of bed on school days.

\_\_\_ If I lie down, sit down in class, or am riding to school as a passenger in the car or on the bus, I could fall asleep.

\_\_\_ I find it hard to focus in class and my mind wanders.

\_\_\_ If I put my head on my desk at school, I could fall asleep.

\_\_\_ It takes me longer to do my homework than I'd like.

\_\_\_ I feel bored at school or like I'm in a daze.

\_\_\_ I fall asleep when I get home from school.

\_\_\_ If I get to bed on time, it's hard for me to fall asleep.



While not a clinical assessment tool, if you answer yes to some of these questions, it's likely that you need more sleep. Put together, the amount of sleep you get each night, along with these signs of inadequate sleep, will help you see if you need to add more sleep to your nightly schedule.

Ideally, I should get \_\_\_\_\_ hours of sleep each night.

During the week, my schedule should be:

Bedtime \_\_\_\_\_

Wake time \_\_\_\_\_

On the weekend or school holidays, my schedule should be:

Bedtime \_\_\_\_\_

Wake time \_\_\_\_\_

(Aim to keep your weekend schedule within one or two hours of your weekday schedule.) For more on this dilemma of sleeping in, see page 153.

## **UNDERSTAND THE PERFECT STORM SO YOU CAN STAY OUT OF ITS PATH**

What is making it hard for you to get optimal sleep? Our modern world makes sleep very difficult. Sleep is often a last priority when all the things in the day are done. Check the factors that are impacting your sleep:



Smartphones and the difficulty of saying goodbye/good night to friends  
Difficulty turning off video games or online content  
Overscheduling  
Noise or light pollution  
Academic overload  
Job responsibilities  
Stress or anxiety  
Worry about safety or the future  
Difficulty winding down and falling asleep (often due to home lighting, screens, and social jet lag)  
Too-early school start times  
Long commute/transportation issues  
Undervaluing sleep  
What else can you add? \_\_\_\_\_

Since technology is one of our main “sleep stealers,” look at page 101 in chapter 4. Ask these questions out loud to your family or friends and let them be your guide for talking about how technology affects us and the power it has over our sleep.

## CHALLENGE MYTHS

Circle any of the following myths that you see around you or that apply to your own thinking. Select those you think might be affecting you, and rewrite them to reflect a more helpful and sleep-forward view. (This is an exercise in cognitive behavioral therapy—often cited as having the highest evidence-based efficacy.) For example, “If I stay up late and cram, I’ll do better on my tests” might become “Studying incrementally and getting enough sleep means my brain remembers information and I’ll do even better on my tests.”



My sleep can wait. I can tough it out.

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I don't need as much sleep as other people. (This is a common myth, when in fact a very small percentage of the population needs less sleep than the rest of us.)

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If I stay up late and cram, I'll do better on my tests.

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I must get into the best-ranked college to be happy.

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I have to do lots of AP classes and after-school activities for my college applications.

---

I should try to be good at everything.

---

I need to know what's going on in the world at all times.

---

I need to know what my friends are doing at all times.

---

I have to respond to texts and alerts immediately.

---

Bedtime routines are just for babies and little kids.

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## IDENTIFY YOUR *WHY*

By now you know the myriad benefits of good sleep, but it helps to identify the benefits you personally would like to achieve. Really go long on this list and search out your own personal truths of why you want to live a better life. It doesn't matter if they relate to health or even what people would consider superficial things. (Heather's husband cites how much better he looks on Zoom when he's sleeping well.) These reasons should be what matters to you—no matter what they are—and they will be your motivation. When you have the thought “Lemme just skim Instagram in bed real quick,” this list is your motivational coach yelling, “Leave that goshdarn phone behind so we can shave time off that 400 meter!” Do not start your challenge without this step! For the challenge to work, you should think about what it is you wish for, not what your partner or parent says is important. If you don't feel connected to *why* you are doing something, it's harder to stick with it.

Choose the benefits you would like to acquire in your life, along with the corresponding negative effects of inadequate sleep you would like to say goodbye to. Choose at least two from the following chart.

ADEQUATE SLEEP LEADS TO:		TOO LITTLE SLEEP LEADS TO:
Positive mood/outlook	vs.	Feeling down/pessimistic
Ability to focus	vs.	Poor focus/concentration
Good energy level	vs.	Low energy/lethargic
Improved appearance	vs.	Looking tired, dark circles
Physical strength/athleticism	vs.	Lower strength/athletic ability
More patient/longer fuse	vs.	Short-tempered
Weight normalizes	vs.	Weight gain
Improved immune function	vs.	Low immune strength
Overall health benefits	vs.	Long-term health problems





ADEQUATE SLEEP LEADS TO:		TOO LITTLE SLEEP LEADS TO:
Better relationships	vs.	Relationship conflicts
Depression/anxiety lessen	vs.	Depression/anxiety increase
_____	vs.	_____
_____	vs.	_____



## STEP TWO: CLARIFY YOUR GOAL

What exactly do you want to change or improve in regard to your sleep? You've gathered good info from Step 1. Now put it together here. This could be as simple as increasing your sleep time by half an hour, improving your routines, or creating more technology boundaries—they are all interwoven. Your goal is not necessarily the same as anyone else's—friends, parents, siblings, and so forth. Articulate your goal in your own words. We're both fans of achievable goals. This isn't about being perfect—this is about doing what works in your life.

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For example:

*I want to sleep thirty minutes more every school night.*

*I will put my phone away each night in another room so I can feel more peaceful.*

*I am going to wake up on the weekends by 8:30 a.m. to reduce my social jet lag.*

*My goal is to fall asleep easier.*

*My goal is to reduce my stress levels and sleep one hour more each school night.*





## STEP THREE: MODIFY YOUR 5 SLEEP HABITS

No matter your unique goal, the five habits will help you achieve it. The good news is that the habits work together and all contribute to creating a sleep bubble. But this also means that, since they work together, we cannot leave one out—the bubble could lose air or even pop. For example, if you set good bedtimes, but you don't put away electronics an hour before, you sleep in too late on Sunday, or you nap in the late afternoon after school one day—the good bedtime habit is likely to suffer. All of the five habits support one another, so addressing each of them is super important. Sorry, we'd love to have you pick and choose, but nature did not form our finely tuned biological sleep systems this way! It doesn't mean that you have to be strict about every single piece of gold standard information, but if you're not sleeping enough and feeling your best, this is your body telling you to take a step closer to that gold standard.

The Five Habits of Happy Sleepers:

1. S—Set your sleep times
2. L—Lay out your three routines
3. E—Extract your sleep stealers; replace unhelpful sleep associations with helpful ones
4. E—Eliminate light and make your bedroom a cave
5. P—Practice a sleep-friendly daytime

### HABIT #1: SET YOUR SLEEP TIMES

Using the information on page 154, write down your new sleep and wake times. To give your regular bedtime the prelude it needs, remember your wind-down begins sixty minutes before sleep. Wind-down is simple; the



only *must-dos* are putting away certain devices, turning off bright lights in the house, and creating a calm feeling. Your bedtime routine can start about fifteen to thirty minutes before your bedtime.

### My sleep times

WEEKDAY	WEEKEND
Wind-down_____	Wind-down_____
Bedtime routine_____	Bedtime routine_____
Sleep_____	Sleep_____
Wake time_____	Wake time_____

Instead of jumping to a new bedtime, move your sleep times fifteen to thirty minutes longer per night until you get to the right time. If possible, keep your weekend bedtime and wake time within an hour of your weekday times. In the examples below, see that the younger teen is able to move toward optimal sleep, while the older teen’s realistic goal is adequate sleep during the school week.

Examples:

- A twelve-year-old who goes to sleep at 10:30 p.m. and wakes at 6:30 a.m. is getting eight hours and is missing one to two hours per night (for optimal sleep). Her goal is to increase her nightly sleep by one hour. The first week, she moves her bedtime thirty minutes earlier, to 10:00 p.m.—putting away all devices at 9:00 p.m.—and she sets her alarm fifteen minutes later in the morning, as she doesn’t have to leave the house until 7:30 a.m. The second week she moves her bedtime to 9:45 p.m. Now she’s sleeping from 9:45 p.m. to 6:45 a.m. Nine hours per night.
- A seventeen-year-old who goes to sleep around 1:00 a.m. and wakes at 7:00 a.m. is getting six hours and is missing at least two (for adequate sleep). His initial goal is to reach adequate sleep by moving



his bedtime earlier by thirty minutes each week, until he's at 11:00 p.m. He will also keep to an 8:30 a.m. wake time on the weekend to reduce social jet lag.

## HABIT #2: LAY OUT YOUR THREE ROUTINES

Write down your new wind-down, bedtime, and morning routine. Look at pages 158–163 for ideas. Remember to include both practical steps (like wash face and pack backpack) as well as enjoyable steps (like watch an episode of TV, read a graphic novel, or listen to a podcast).

Wind-down routine: \_\_\_\_\_

Bedtime routine: \_\_\_\_\_

Morning routine: \_\_\_\_\_

## HABIT #3: EXTRACT YOUR SLEEP STEALERS

Look at the lists of unhelpful sleep associations and remove them. Remember these are anything that is happening *right before or as you fall asleep*. Some of the helpful sleep associations emerge naturally (like darkness and cool sheets), while others can be added actively (like passive distractions, page 169).

Check the box next to the association(s) you will eliminate.

Unhelpful sleep associations (what I'm doing right before or as I fall asleep):

- Interacting with phones, tablets, computers
- Texts, emails, video games, social media, talking on phone
- Watching television as I fall asleep



- News, alerts, stressful discussions
- Falling asleep on the couch or other location than bed
- Falling asleep with the lights on
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Check the box next to the association(s) you will have/add.

Sleep-promoting associations (what I'm doing as I fall asleep):

- The feel of my blankets, pillows, and body position
- My dark, quiet bedroom
- Space in my mind, my own thoughts and imagery
- Trusting my body and letting go
- Simple meditation or relaxation breathing (see the appendix)
- Listening to an audiobook or podcast (see page 169)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## HABIT #4: MAKE YOUR BEDROOM A CAVE

Create a dark, cool, quiet cave environment with the following checklists. This is a chance to design an enticing, sleep-welcoming bedroom that you look forward to nestling into.

### Must-dos

These simple adjustments are basic to falling asleep easily, so it's best to put them in place right away (you'll see overlap between these and your wind-down and bedtime routines):

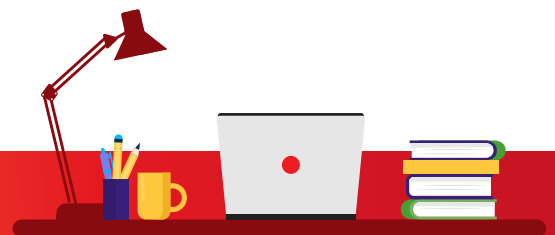


- Dim the light in your home one to two hours before bedtime.
- Put away phones, tablets, computers, and any close-held screens an hour before bedtime.
- Close blinds or curtains, preferably blackout.
- Turn off all lights, including any decorative lights or lamps, in your bedroom before climbing into bed.
- Lower thermostat to 65–68 degrees, thirty minutes before bedtime (or as cool as is reasonable in the summer).
- Make sure you have the right covers to be comfortable and cozy.

### Can-dos

Enhance your dark, cool cave even more with these ideas or some of your own.

- Get a lower intensity light or “sleep friendly” book light for reading before bed.
- Be a light detective: make sure there are no other sources of light in your bedroom.
- Install dimmers on your wall switches and lamps.
- Order your blackout shades or curtain.
- Figure out how to dim your bathroom for showering, brushing teeth, and so forth before bed. A night-light is a good option in the bathroom.
- Set up a workspace and hangout space that is not your bed.
- Invest in a new set of sheets and pillow for your bed. If you make your bed feel special and super comfortable, you are more likely to look forward to slipping under the covers.
- Same goes for new pj’s or a new nightgown. Make sure you have something you love to wear to bed.
- Wash your sheets once a week. Amazingly, people who wash their sheets weekly get more sleep. Have a second set of sheets on hand and make it a new habit.



- If you like strings of LED lights in your bedroom, choose warm colors like amber, red, and yellow and turn them off before you get into bed to journal or read.
- If you are especially sensitive to light before bed, find a lightbulb for your bedside table lamp that is designed to simulate sunset and promote falling asleep.
- If you like listening to soothing music, audiobooks, or podcasts, figure out how to do so without using a phone or tablet in bed, or at least to put “Do not disturb” on. If you have a smart speaker or an old-fashioned CD player, those will work. Be creative!
- If you live in a noisy home or neighborhood, try earplugs, a fan, or a sound machine to block noises.

## HABIT #5: PRACTICE A SLEEP-FRIENDLY DAYTIME

Review the section (page 178) on ways to protect your sleep with your daytime habits. For each of these, make a note as to the changes or additions you will make.

### 1. Morning light \_\_\_\_\_

Be outside for five to thirty minutes (depending on how sunny it is) when you first wake up in the morning, or as early as possible. This is also important on the weekends, to keep your internal clock in sync. Write down where you will do this and anything else about this morning ritual. (Eat breakfast, run around the block, take the dog for a walk . . .)

### 2. Exercise \_\_\_\_\_

Regular, moderate exercise is good for sleep. Ideally, it should not be done too close to bedtime. Write down your exercise times and



activities. See if there is any practice or exercise happening too late (and perhaps under bright lights).

### 3. Foods that support healthy sleep

Eat lots of vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, seeds, and whole grains, while getting plenty of fiber and limiting sugar, refined carbs, and saturated fats.

- Foods I will eat more of \_\_\_\_\_
- Foods I will eat less of \_\_\_\_\_
- Caffeine cutoff time \_\_\_\_\_

Write down your cutoff time for caffeine and energy drinks. Everyone's a little different, but somewhere between 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. is a good cutoff time for most. This includes coffee, soda, caffeinated tea, and energy drinks. Remember that vaping products often have nicotine in them, which is a stimulant.

- Alcohol \_\_\_\_\_

Limit alcohol and avoid drinking it in the two hours before your bedtime.

- Bedtime snacks \_\_\_\_\_

If you like a bedtime snack, choose something small and that is easy to digest. Avoid spicy and fatty foods too close to bedtime, as well as big portions of any food. For example, a bowl of cereal and milk. Heather makes her family a plate of walnuts, crackers, cheese, and sliced fruit while they watch TV together before bed (her dad did the same for her as a kid).

### 4. Smart napping \_\_\_\_\_

If, after modifying your five habits, you are not able to sleep enough at night (for example, because of a too-early school start time and





lots of homework), napping may be a good option for you. If you do nap, it's ideal to do it every day so it becomes routine, to nap in the afternoon, not in the evening, and to keep naps to about twenty to thirty minutes.



## STEP 4: THE SLEEP CHALLENGE

Your challenge is to use the tools you've learned to reach the goal you wrote in Step 2. It often takes at least one week for your body to learn new timing and habits and to see an improvement in your sleep. For this reason, commit to a period of time in which to change your sleep habits, to allow your brain to learn these new patterns. We recommend choosing a seven-, fourteen-, or twenty-eight-day period in which you'll commit to your new habits. You can use the following table to make notes and track your progress.

Rewrite your goal from Step 2 here:

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NOTES	DAY	BEDTIME	WAKE-UP TIME	HOURS OF SLEEP
	Day 1			
	Day 2			
	Day 3			
	Day 4			
	Day 5			
	Day 6			
	Day 7			



NOTES	DAY	BEDTIME	WAKE-UP TIME	HOURS OF SLEEP

Here are some ideas for creating a challenge. Feel free to adjust them to what's best suited to you and your group or family:

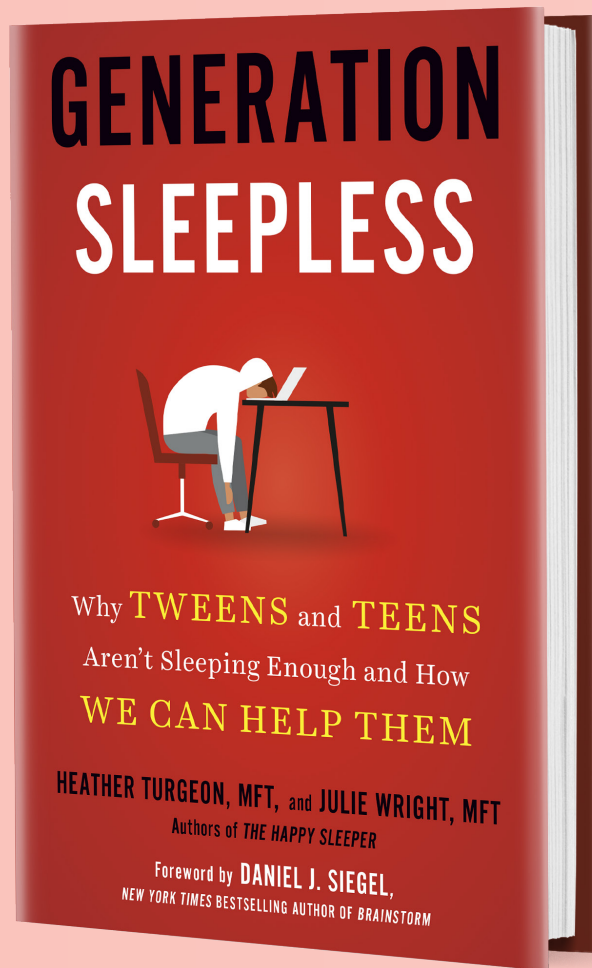
- Teens can create a five-day challenge with a group of friends to do on weekdays.
- A sports team or theater group can do a challenge together as they prepare for a big game or performance. (Remember how LeBron loves sleep? So does Beyoncé.) See page 123 to lock your team in on the athletic benefits of more sleep. An actor will remember lines better with a good night's sleep before or after rehearsal. Sports coaches or directors, order each team or cast member a cozy sleep mask with the team's or play's name on it instead of swag T-shirts this year. Anything to inspire your teens and make it fun.
- The wonderful feeling of having slept well should be your main reward, but it can be fun to add in some lighthearted rewards for the person who "wins" the challenge. For example, if one person meets their goal after seven days, they are crowned "Sleep Champ" and they don't have to do dishes for the week. But who will win it the next week?

If you are taking the Sleep Challenge with a friend group or team, form a text group in which you report your hours of sleep or any other results every day or week. (No texting after wind-down time, though!) This will keep you accountable to each other and help you support each other. If you do the Sleep Challenge as a family, keep the mood light and



curious. Everyone is on their own path. Note each person's progress toward more hours of sleep and which adjustments they were able to stick to. For those who made positive progress, discuss the changes to how they are feeling during the day and the benefits they're noticing. Let each person express their awareness of the connection between sleeping longer and feeling better on their own, rather than saying something like "Aren't you feeling better now?" If someone made little or no progress, that's okay too. Our lives and chemistries are not the same. Brainstorm tweaks to make that align better with your life. Just remember to gently go back to creating small, incremental, and achievable adjustments for the next week, and remember that small changes add up, gradually allowing you to hear your brain's and body's cues and to naturally fill up on healthy sleep.





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