

It's Midnight? No, You Can't Have My Cell Phone!

BY HANNELORE WRAHTZ, TUALATIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

Modern America is filled with threats to a healthy social balance. Every day the news reports on surprising and unfortunate occurrences that diminish our wellness. Bullying. E-coli breakouts at our favorite fast food restaurants. The spread of previously unheard of infectious diseases like Zika. If that is not enough to ruin your day, the headlines warn of existential threats in the form of terrorism, financial collapse, and global warming. Bad stuff rumbles outside of our control, and therefore, attitudes of acceptance or denial prevail.

On the bright side, however, there is a threat to healthy society and individuals that is in the power of the average persons to deal with, if we were inclined. Instead of this problem being addressed and solved, ironically, it just gets worse. We are, of course, talking about the ages old problem of sleep deprivation in teenagers and its ravages on society. Not only is this problem at an all-time high, and posing a serious threat to the well-being of our youth (and everyone who has to live with them), all signs indicate the problem becomes worse as the day continues to offer up only 24 simple hours, as families become busier, and as the temptations of technology hurt as much as help the situation.

About those 24 hours... When in the course of human history has a person ever had enough time? There is always more to do than there are hours to do it. Once upon a time, people were hunters and gathers, and by the time the chores were done at the cave and the tribal fires dwindled, people curled up in their furs and called it a day. Today, with electricity and endless light, humans find more tasks to fill the hours, and the normal "sun rise and sun set" cycle no longer applies. We read books all night, not by candle, but by overhead lamp that lights up the cozy bed; and, if you are a high school student, your teachers have given you excessive amounts of homework to stretch your fertile brain keeping hard working teenagers up late into the night.

The pressures of modern society demand it. Young people want to grow up and compete in a

complex world. The pressure is on to out-perform oneself and one's peers not only academically but in extra-curricular activities as well. Teens need time to relax and chill with friends as well as have quality time with family. But with expectations for community volunteerism, the stress of looming college applications, ACT and SAT test prep, and part-time jobs for some - BANG! A teenager is on over-load. Because time management is a necessary but unmastered skill, it is no wonder teenagers, burdened with "Do it all NOW!" find themselves up late when they should be sleeping. Obviously, there just aren't enough hours in the day.

Omnipresence technology is another major contributing factor/distractor to American teenagers' lack of sleep. According to a 2011 National Sleep Foundation poll on electronic use, "Some 72 percent (of teens) bring cell phones into their bedrooms and use them when they are trying to go to sleep, and 28 percent leave their phones on while sleeping, only to be awakened at night by texts, calls or emails" (Richter).

Modern technology and social media make constant entertainment an endless temptation. With easy accessibility to the electronic world, staying focused and productive in the real world is more difficult, especially for teenagers who tend to prioritize the wrong things and suffer the consequences in the night. Engaging electronic devices are addictive and a time-

suck because sleep will never compete with the enticements of the internet, games, and stalking other people on Instagram.

Whatever the reasons, consequences from lack of sleep can be severe and even deadly. Sleep is the body's opportunity for regeneration and brain growth and one of the most important things to do to stay healthy. Sleep improves everything—body, mind, emotions, spirit. Not getting enough sleep does the opposite, increasing the potential for serious meltdowns, like with bratty siblings and nagging parents who want you to empty the dishwasher and take out the trash. According to Ruthann Richter of Stanford Medicine, "Sleep deprivation increases the likelihood teens will suffer myriad negative consequences, including an inability to concentrate, poor grades, drowsy-driving incidents, anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide and even suicide attempts."

Given the severity of the consequences, clearly the problem of sleep deprivation needs to be dealt with, and soon, or the world will come to an end. While it is painful to the environment when teenagers are not well-rested, teenagers suffer the most, and sadly, when they do not take this problem seriously, the results can lead to bad outcomes they will live to regret.

What does good self-care look like? Intellectually we know: exercise, nutrition, self-respect, and sleep. What do teenagers prioritize as self-care? How about good hygiene and grooming - voluminous hair, manicured nails, a fresh tan - essentials to self-love and social acceptability. No one under

twenty years of age believes the old saw about "getting your beauty sleep." Dark under-eye circles in the morning? No problem - concealer will do the trick. The mindset needs to change for the life style to change. Sleep deprivation is a problem that can be solved, and if it were, the world would be a more peaceful, healthy place. We can't stop all the dangers that exist in the world that appear in the form of such things as E-coli, Zika, or even ISIS, but we can eliminate the detrimental effects of teenage under-sleeping.

Sleep is essential for everyone, but is even more important for teenagers whose bodies are still developing and are typically are under a lot of stress due to such busy lives - obviously. Lack of time is a big excuse for giving up those needed hours of sleep. Hardworking teens will be more prepared for the demands of the adult world when they learn the discipline of time management and prioritizing sleep. Furthermore, technology is a human invention that was meant to make life better - individuals should control it, not the other way around. Both time and technology are factors that have played a major role in the problem of teenagers not being able to sleep enough, and clearly this is a problem that can be solved.

Sleep deprivation is a way of life in America, an unhealthy part of our modern hard driving culture. Schools can consider realistic workloads, and parents can act like parents and enforce stricter rules in the lives of their teens, although I double dare my mom to take my iPhone away from me before I go to bed at night.

OK... Let's get honest. It is possible the problem of teen tiredness will never be solved.



Hannelore Wrahtz is a busy and often sleep deprived Senior at Tualatin High School who is OSU bound. Follow her on Instagram [@hannelore_wrahtz](https://www.instagram.com/hannelore_wrahtz).

