

# Wake Up, Sleepy Head!

*Your instinct to wake up your teen may or may not be right.*

BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

**T**he stereotype goes something like this: Teen stays up late, late, late, watching TV, or playing video games, or IMing online, or even studying because there just wasn't enough time between school, sports and chores.

Teen then sleeps late, late, late, while Mom stews, stews, stews.

Around 10 a.m., Mom starts closing doors with a little more force than is necessary.

An hour later, she's slamming pots onto the kitchen counter.

Two hours later, she practices her opera singing outside Teen's bedroom door.

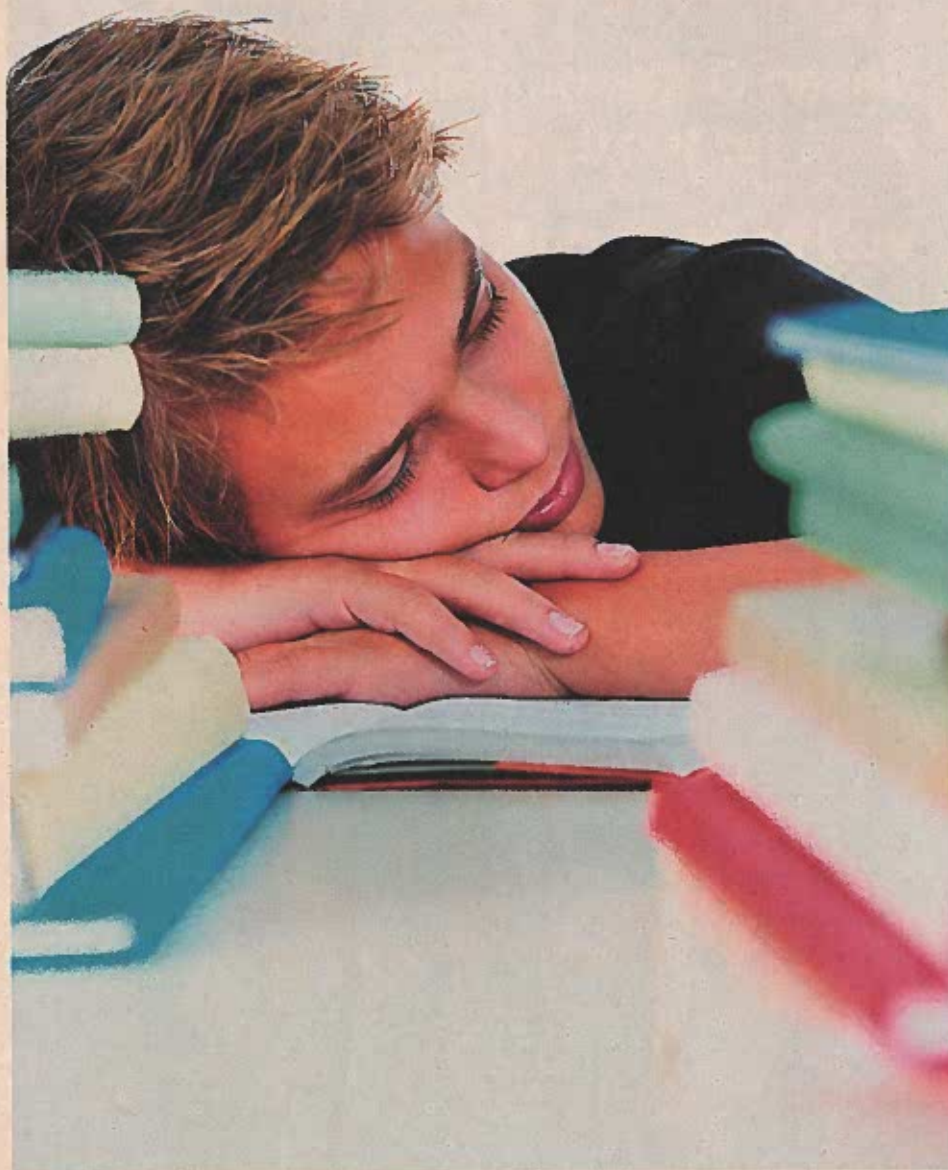
Three hours later, she opens that door and starts screaming in Teen's ear.

Who's in the wrong here – Teen or Mom?

If Teen is the average teenager, whose body cycle seems to work best with 12 hours of sleep, preferably from 2 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mom might be in the wrong: Teens' bodies have different snooze buttons than the rest of us, and their busy schedules make it so they have to squeeze in sleeping when they can – often during weekend days when Mom wants her child to clean, study or maybe just spend a half hour of uninterrupted time talking with the family.

It's natural for a mother to want to force a teen to follow the sleep schedule that's worked so well for her for so many years, but the results could be deadly:

According to the National Sleep



Foundation, "the most troubling consequences of sleepiness are injuries and deaths related to lapses in attention and delayed response times at critical moments, such as while driving. Drowsiness or fatigue has been identified as a principle cause in at least 100,000 police-reported traffic crashes each year, killing more than 1,500 Americans and injuring another 71,000, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The clincher: "Drivers age 25 or under are involved in more than one-half of fall-asleep crashes."

According to Webmd.com, one study of American high school students found that 13 percent were chronically sleep-deprived.

"Chronically" isn't defined, but even if your teen gets the recommend 8 to 9 ½ hours sleep five out of seven nights week, that resting time still might not be enough.

The key is knowing your teen and looking for signs of trouble.

*Snooze... or Lose* authors Dr. Helene A. Emsellem and Carol Whitely offer these questions for teens at their web site, [www.snoozeorlose.com](http://www.snoozeorlose.com):

- Are you sleepier than you would like to be?
- Did you doze off in any of your morning classes this week?
- Are you too tired to socialize with friends?
- Is sleeping in late on the weekends essential?
- Does 7 a.m. feel like the middle of the night?
- Are you missing things you'd like to do because you are too sleepy or asleep?
- Do you fall asleep doing things that you want to do?
- Are you too tired to work out?
- Are you grouchier and edgier than you'd like to be?
- Are you just too tired to think?
- Do you think you need more sleep?

They advise that if a teen answers "yes" to any of these questions, he or she may be "significantly sleep deprived."

Teens often realize that they need to make adjustments, as was the case for Linda Lowen's two teens. They're a busy family from central New York, and 17-year-old Jaye started sleeping in late in 8th grade. She'd wake up at 1 p.m. She's been involved in local theater since first grade, and now has a part-time job.

When she's not busy, she comes home from school and naps. She also naps on days "off."

"The more she naps and sleeps, the more sluggish she becomes," says Linda. "I'm glad when she's busy because she seems to function much better with less sleep. Too much sleep and she's not a pleasant person to be around, probably because her life has no shape to it. But when she's working a lot of hours, or occupied by a play, she's more 'awake' generally, more lively and fun to be



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with...[She] is learning to adjust her sleep patterns. She's of normal weight, actually on the skinny side, so she doesn't always exercise to maintain weight, but she's realizing that regular exercise will give her more energy and reduce her desire to just crash out and nap."

Linda reports that 14-year-old Em polices herself pretty well when it comes to sleep, too, or she and the family pay the consequences:

"She knows she needs to get more hours into the sleep bank when she shortchanges herself, and she'll tell the rest of the family that she's going to bed early because she's lost out on sleep earlier in the week. On weekends, she'd overcompensate and sleep 10 to 12 hours a night. She sleeps more regularly now (7 to 8 hours a night during school) but if she doesn't get enough sleep it's as if her emotions go underground. She's much less responsive. Mornings are hard for her, and she's definitely gotten into drinking coffee to keep her going. When she gets too

little sleep, she is literally a zombie."

Seattle area resident Shari Steelsmith Duffin, author of *Go To Your Room: Consequences That Teach*, is also reasonable in helping her family get the sleep they need:

"My son is 14 and a half. During the last school year he slept between 8 and 9 hours each night. This summer I've been letting him sleep in fairly late, mostly because I've been doing some reading about how important sleep (and exercise) is to brain development in the teen years," Shari notes. "He sleeps now, on average, 10 to 11 hours a night. Because it's light early in the morning here, he uses a sleep mask and a small fan for white noise."

Shari isn't concerned that 10 to 11 hours seems like a lot. Her son is cooperative and happy in the daytime when he sleeps for that amount of time – and if he doesn't, he "complains bitterly."

"I see [the 11 hours] as an investment in healthy brain development. I make him go to bed anywhere from 10 to 11:30 p.m.," she

says. "He does resist bedtime, but doesn't give us too much grief about it."

(Although, occasionally, Shari has made his cell phone "sleep downstairs" so calls and text messages won't tempt him to stay awake.)

Shari is ready for the changes her family will face this fall

"My son will start high school and will take an extra-curricular class at 6 a.m., before school. My daughter is starting middle school and will also switch to an earlier schedule than what she's been accustomed to," she notes. "We plan, as a family, to move our collective bedtimes (all of us) up one hour to accommodate the earlier rising we will all need to do. In addition, we plan to have my daughter shower in the evenings so that she can sleep a little later in the mornings. She seems incapable of taking a brief shower."

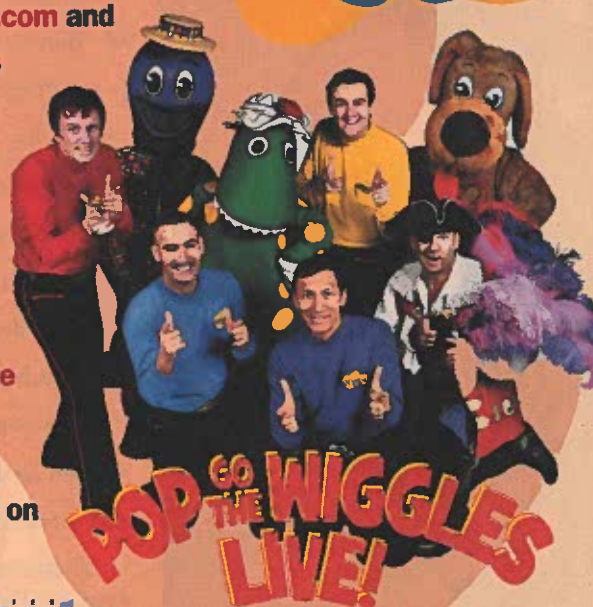
Hopefully, the parent that plans ahead can plan on having well-rested and well-behaved children at home and school. **P**

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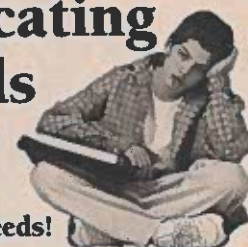


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