

## Are Those Eyelids Drooping In The Afternoon?

By Jo-An Vargo

We've just begun the school year, and readjusting our body clocks and family schedules to a rhythm different than the relaxing days of summer can be difficult. Therefore, this month's article about the importance of sleep for good health and learning will be longer than usual; I want to give this important topic proper attention.

The National Sleep Foundation <<http://www.sleepfoundatin.org/>> — a great resource by the way — gives us an approximate amount of sleep for various ages. Take a look:

AGE	SLEEP NEEDS
Newborns (0-2 months)	12—18 hours
Infants (3—11 months)	12—15 hours during night and 30-minute to two-hour naps, one to four times a day
Toddlers (1—3 years)	12—14 hours
Preschoolers (3—5 years)	11—13 hours
School Age (5 –12 years)	10—11 hours
Teenagers (11—17 years)	8.5—9.25 hours
Adults	7—9 hours

I looked at these figures and rated myself over the last few weeks . . . hmmm, frequently not getting the sleep I need. What to do? Now I understand there are different needs: the number of hours we need to operate optimally versus the fact that we all need even more than this basic amount if we've accumulated several nights with inadequate sleep. That must be why I slept more over the weekend; my body was trying to catch up! Has this happened in your family?

And what about those different stages of sleep that satisfy different needs?

Stage 1: Light sleep that occurs between being awake and entering sleep. Often in this transition, people report having a variety of strange imagery.

Stage 2: Our breathing and heart rate are regular and body temperature goes down.

Stage 3 & 4: Blood pressure drops, breathing slows, energy is restored, and hormones are released for growth and development. These are the stages of sleep that are most healthful and renewing for the human system.

I'm sure you're also aware of REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. But did you know that the longer we spend in this type of sleep, the better our brain consolidates memory? Now that is surely an important fact for our young learners who are sponges for the many learning experiences they encounter during the day! Sleep researchers are helping us understand what a significant role the different stages of sleep play in various types of learning. Memory for facts appears to consolidate early in our sleep cycles, motor tasks seem to solidify during Stage 2, and pattern recognition seems to occur later – during our REM sleep. There are also indications that

REM sleep is when the brain is working to sort through the chaotic stew of the day's memories and thread them with earlier preserved bits to make sense of our world's life experiences.

Of course, besides the negative impact on learning and memory, there are the medical warnings about the lack of sleep: a weakened immune system, the increased risk for diabetes and obesity, and increasingly higher levels of stress. The bottom line is that our children need to get the right amount of sleep, and so do we! That right amount depends on our age and our activity levels.

Here are some tips that might help us all accomplish this goal:

- Try to keep a consistent schedule, although some researchers suggest that weekends might be the time to catch up on sleep lost during the week.
- Exercise regularly but not just before going to bed.
- Eating should end two to three hours before bedtime.
- Keep that TV out of the bedroom and off just before bedtime. Quiet music and/or reading are better choices.
- Make sure the room is dark, quiet, and cool.

We're hopefully about to experience Indian summer, and the long days are still with us. I love this upcoming time of year and know it's hard to change back into school routines. However, making sleep a priority and taking some time to analyze our individual and family patterns is so important for a successful year in school!