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CHS Junior

Early mornings, late nights

For students, by students at Calvert High School

By STEPHANIE TAUBERT Oct 4, 2011



- Credit: Photo illustration by COURTNEY COSTELLO

<P> Most parents are not surprised when their teenager stays up late doing homework. In fact, it's considered normal for teens to finally get to bed around 11 p.m. But could these late night study sessions be having a negative effect on the health of America's youth?<P> Parents might not understand why their child would want to stay up so late on a school night, but according to sleep studies, this type of sleep pattern may not even be controlled by the teenager, but by a natural clock inside them.<P> According to The American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the human body has its own timing system known as a circadian rhythm. This "biological clock" lets the body know when to fall asleep and when to wake up. As teenagers approach puberty, there is a shift in their circadian rhythm, called a "sleep phase delay." For example, before puberty, children may have naturally fallen asleep around 8 or 9 p.m. However, once reaching puberty there's roughly a two hour shift, meaning that the adolescent may not fall asleep until 10 or 11 p.m.<P> In addition to their naturally late bed times, adolescents usually need to wake up early in the morning for school. At Calvert High School, first period starts at 7:24 a.m., meaning that most students are awake around 6 a.m.<P> Students often complain that their lack of sleep makes it difficult for them to stay awake.<P> "After staying up late to finish homework, the next day you feel physically and mentally drained, sometimes it's just a struggle to stay awake in class," said Calvert High School junior Katie King.<P> Adolescents' active lives after school hours can also contribute to their lack of sleep. Many students participate in some sort of extracurricular activity, such as driver's education, sports, music, theater, or clubs sponsored by Calvert High School. While beneficial, these programs may cause students to delay their homework until the evening, which also delays their sleep. Izaak Baker, a junior at Calvert High School, is an active member of Calvert Theatre, which is notorious for having rehearsals until 8 p.m. during the week.<P> "When I first signed up for theater, I thought it'd maybe be a couple of hours every Tuesday or something. Don't get me wrong, I love theater! But the amount of time I have to devote to it really cuts into time I have for other fun pastimes like… sleeping," Izaak says.<P> Dr. Harry G. Kerasidis, director of Calvert Memorial Hospital's Sleep Disorders Center, works to diagnose sleep disorders that cause sleep deprivation. He agrees that sleep deprivation is a serious problem.<P> "There is a tendency to minimize the importance of sleep in order to get more done. And as a result, they are less efficient and get less things done," he said.<P> Kerasidis suggests that students who are sleep-deprived should first recognize that they have a problem.<P> Then, students should prioritize, with sleep at the top of their list. Adolescents must learn to put their health first by getting their homework done

early and getting to sleep on time, he said.<P> If problems still occur, Jim Hardenstine, the director of Cardiopulmonary Services at Calvert Memorial Hospital, suggests talking with a pediatrician, and possibly having a sleep study done.<P> <P>