Teenagers are the sleepiest people around. In fact, teens are the sleepiest age group in the entire population! Sleepiness among teens is partly caused by biology and partly caused by lifestyle. First, the biological need for sleep is great in the teen years. Sleep is like food for the brain and body, and large amounts of sleep are needed when the body is growing. The teen years are like a “growth spurt” of physical and mental development. At the same time, teens have increasing demands on their time from schoolwork, family and friends. Because they are overloaded with activities, teens tend to skimp on sleep.

Research shows that teens need 8.5 to 9 hours of sleep per night in order to feel and function at their best. Even though they need just as much sleep as their younger siblings, surveys show that teens actually get only about 6.5 hours of sleep per night during the school week. Part of the problem is that the teenager’s body clock is working against them. In the teen years, the body’s internal biological clock tends to shift later – causing teenagers most likely become “night owls.” That means, teens feel most wide awake in the evenings and often do not begin to feel sleepy until midnight or later. If they watch television late at night or use the computer, this tends to alert the brain and delay the feeling of sleepiness even further. Then, because they need about 9 hours of sleep, the brain doesn’t want to wake up until mid-morning. Due to the delayed body clock and social activities in the evenings, many teens are half asleep during morning classes.

Sleepiness leads to all kinds of problems. The sleepy brain does not perform as well as the well-rested brain. Research has shown that students who sleep at least 8 hours per night make better grades than students who sleep less than 8 hours per night. Short sleepers also have more trouble paying attention in school, more accidents when they begin driving, more physical ailments, and more emotional problems (such as irritability, anxiety, and depression).