

The sleep factor

KS4 Lesson: The importance of sleep



The importance of sleep

This lesson for key stage 4 helps young people to understand the importance of sleep and the impact of lifestyle choices on sleep quality.

No lesson should be taught in isolation, but always as part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme. This lesson would work well within broader learning on healthy, balanced lifestyles and builds on the key stage 1, 2 and 3 lessons in the pack.

Learning objective

To learn about the importance of sleep and strategies to maintain healthier sleep habits.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- explain the importance of sleep for wellbeing and brain function
- assess how lifestyle choices can affect sleep quality
- analyse how a range of strategies can support healthier sleep patterns

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson, which include relevant subject knowledge and guidance on establishing ground rules, creating a safe learning environment, assessment, and adapting the lessons to suit student needs.

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Resource 1: *Helpful and less helpful sleep behaviours* [one per student]
- Resource 2: *Consequences of poor sleep habits* [one cut-up set per small group]

Key words

Body clock

Sleep cycle

Circadian rhythm

Jet lag

Baseline assessment

Introduction (Slides 9–10, 2 mins)

Establish ground rules and make students aware of the question box, which will be available throughout the lesson. Explain that if they have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Introduce the learning objective and outcomes. Explain that today's lesson will explore the impact of lifestyle choices on sleep quality, as well as the importance of sleep for wellbeing.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 11, 10 mins)

Hand out **Resource 1: Helpful and less helpful sleep behaviours**. Ask students to read through Abe's scenario and highlight behaviours which both help and detract from a healthier sleep pattern, in two different colours. Then, ask them to answer the questions on the resource:

- How might a lack of sleep affect Abe's wellbeing?
- What strategies could Abe use to help manage the less helpful behaviours identified?

Discuss responses as a class and establish students' current knowledge and understanding. They should not add anything to their own responses during the discussion. Consider how any gaps or misconceptions will be addressed in the lesson, for example, if students are unsure about the impacts of poor-quality sleep on Abe, you may wish to spend more time exploring the consequences of poor sleep habits.

Ask students to put Resource 1 to one side, as they will revisit this at the end of the lesson.

Core activities

How much sleep? (Slide 12, 5 mins)

Share the information on slide 12 about how much sleep teenagers need each night and, in groups, ask students to discuss the following questions:

- What do you think are the biggest barriers to young people getting enough sleep?
- What might someone's sleep environment (e.g. their bedroom) be negatively impacted by?

Take feedback. Students may suggest:

- *Barriers might include: going to bed late due to attending clubs, completing homework, having a part-time job; staying up late gaming, talking to friends, using social media, watching videos or shows online.*
- *Someone's sleep environment might be negatively impacted by: a TV, games consoles, phones and other technology being present. Someone might also share a bedroom, or live somewhere where noise from outside travels in.*

Consequences of poor sleep habits (Slides 13–18, 15 mins)

In groups, give students one scenario from **Resource 2: Consequences of poor sleep habits**. Ask them to discuss why they think their character isn't getting high-quality sleep and what the potential consequences of their character's poor sleep habit(s) might be on their wellbeing and brain function.

Take feedback from each group, ensuring all scenarios are discussed, before sharing the supporting information on **slides 14–18**.

Emphasise that poor-quality sleep, or a lack of sleep, can have a real impact on someone's brain function and that this in turn can affect someone's wellbeing; this is particularly true during adolescence. It is therefore important to identify issues with sleep and find ways to support healthier sleep habits.



Support: Ask students to focus on Layla or Alima, as these scenarios are more accessible to all students.



Challenge: Consider which scenarios to give different groups; Klaudia and Shaznay's scenarios may provide additional challenge for students, while Ryan's may be more accessible.

Students may suggest: road signs reminding drivers to take a break, rules about how long lorry or coach drivers can drive without a break, how long a working shift can be and how much time someone must have off between work shifts.

Managing sleep difficulties (Slides 19–23, 20 mins)

In the same groups, ask students to brainstorm ideas about how the characters might ensure that they get high-quality sleep, or how they might manage any difficulties they are having with sleeping. Take feedback and create a whole class mind map.

Draw out the key learning if students don't suggest these points:

- *Try to stick to a sleep routine, during the week and on weekends, to ensure consistent sleep patterns. Getting 'an early night' can be counterproductive if it is a change of sleep pattern, as the level of sleep hormone is unlikely to be high enough to encourage sleep — this means a person is more likely to struggle to sleep and may therefore be unable to sleep, even at their normal bedtime. Similarly, pressing the 'snooze' button can again mean disrupting the normal sleep pattern, so it's best to avoid this if possible. Experts suggest that people find it easier to wake naturally in 90-minute cycles — so an alarm should be set to wake someone up after 9 hours, or 7.5 hours' sleep if having a one-off late night.*
- *Avoid taking naps late in the day, or that last a long time. Naps should only be used if absolutely necessary. It is much better to try to improve the quality and length of night-time sleep.*
- *Eat a small snack before bed, if hungry, as this can help with falling asleep and improve sleep quality but avoid eating a large meal as this can make it more difficult to sleep.*
- *Eat breakfast in the morning - not eating breakfast increases the likelihood of sugar cravings and energy dips which are already potential problems due to lack of sleep — this is why someone might consume junk food and energy drinks when they are feeling tired. Such food/drinks can then disrupt the sleep cycle further, so are best avoided.*
- *Avoid watching TV and using screens which produce blue light waves that disrupt the release of sleep hormones. Someone might also install a blue light filter on their devices.*
- *Practise meditation, visualisation and mindfulness techniques before bed, to help relax.*

- *Have a set 'wind down' routine before bed, for example, prepare for the next day (pack school bag, make lunch), read or have a cup of herbal tea, and avoid stimulating activities 60-90 minutes before bed.*
- *Keep a sleep diary to find out what helps with high quality sleep and what prevents sleep, and adjust sleep routines accordingly.*
- *Avoid oversleeping at weekends. It's suggested that for every hour lost/gained when travelling across time zones, it takes the body 1 day to catch up - oversleeping at the weekend can have a similar effect. Having a lie in for 3 hours can take the body 3 days to catch up to this sleep pattern change (social jet lag).*
- *Practise muscle relaxation or deep breathing techniques if struggling to fall or stay asleep. If someone wakes up in the night and cannot get back to sleep, it is also recommended that they get up and go to a different room, read or listen to music, and then try going to sleep again about 20 minutes later.*

Finally, ask students to assess which strategy might be most helpful for their character and discuss what action their character might take next. Take feedback from each group.

- *Students might suggest a range of strategies from the class list; there are no right or wrong answers. But it's important that someone finds strategies that work for them; they might have to try a few before they find the best one.*
- *Actions the characters might take next include:*
 - *Layla and her dad might find it helpful to talk about a better morning routine together*
 - *Abdi should discuss how tired he's been feeling with his parents, so that he and his family are not subject to unnecessary risk when using the tools and machinery in the woodwork shop*
 - *Su might consider doing something different to relax before her next game, but could take a short nap the morning of the final, as long as this is no more than 30 minutes long*
 - *Tal should avoid drinking energy drinks in future and focus on sticking to a revision timetable, so that he feels less need to 'cram' before his exams*
 - *Alima should not drive if she does not feel alert enough to do so*
 - *Connor should take responsibility for his behaviour, rather than distracting others to mask his embarrassment*

Highlight that if any of the characters want to change their sleep habits, it takes approximately 4 weeks to establish a new sleep routine. If a person is struggling to adapt their sleep pattern, they can try shifting their alarm by 10 minutes each week.



Support: Prompt students with questions such as: What activities should be avoided before sleep (for example, eating a large meal)? What routines might make someone feel calm, relaxed and ready for sleep?



Challenge: Ask students to rank the behaviours from most to least likely to encourage sleep. This is likely to be based on students' personal opinions and experiences, so answers will vary.

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Endpoint assessment (Slide 24, 5 mins)

Remind students of the learning outcomes and ask them to revisit the baseline scenario involving Abe. Ask students to annotate their original work to show any changes in opinion or to add in any new learning in a different colour, to demonstrate their new learning on the importance of sleep for wellbeing and brain function, how lifestyle choices can affect sleep quality and the strategies that can support healthier sleep patterns. All students should then write at least three pieces of advice to help Abe sleep better.

This assessment activity will help provide information about students' progress and highlight any gaps that may need addressing in future lessons.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slides 25–26, 3 mins)

If any questions from the question box have not yet been answered, and if time allows, you may wish to address these now. Ensure that students know where they can seek help and advice, both now and in the future, if they are worried or concerned about their sleep. Students seeking further guidance can:

- speak to a parent, carer, or other trusted adult outside of school
- speak to a tutor, head of year or other trusted staff member in school

Find out more information at:

- The Evelina London Children's Hospital website: www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/sleep-medicine-department/how-to-sleep-well-for-teenagers.aspx
- NHS advice: www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep
- The Teen Sleep Hub: www.teensleephub.org.uk
- Young Minds: www.youngminds.org.uk
- Childline: www.childline.org.uk; 0800 1111

Extension activity

Sleep research [slide 27]

Plan and conduct a survey of close friends and family about their sleep patterns. This could include questions about how much they sleep, when they sleep, how they prepare for sleep, techniques they use if struggling to sleep etc.

Ensure any follow-up discussions from this activity are suitably distanced to ensure young people do not share personal or sensitive details.