

I came to the field of sleep medicine with a concentration in physiologic psychology and neuroscience decades ago.

As a Board Certified Sleep Specialist, Boarded under the original ABSM and the new ABIM Sleep Medicine Boards, I have watched as the research in the field of Sleep medicine has made it perfectly clear:

Humans need enough sleep.

Children and adolescents need more sleep than adults.

Getting insufficient sleep has enormous negative impacts in normal daily function, health, growth, cognition, learning and function.

As a Sleep Specialist in clinical practice for 30 years, I know that circadian rhythms are real, and impact when humans are able to sleep. Trying to fall asleep in the hour or two before your circadian rhythm allows is difficult for all but the most sleep deprived. Telling a typical teenager, who needs 9 hours of sleep, and who must get up between 5 to 6 am for school to go to sleep at 8 or 9pm is not practical and doesn't work.

Teenagers who get insufficient sleep are more likely to have attendance problems, to drop out, to have attention issues, behavioral problems, depression and self-harm. They are more likely to have car crashes and athletic injuries. They are less likely to thrive and even to do well on standardized testing, and fortunately, we now have the research to show that these trends reverse when kids are allowed the opportunity to get more sleep. And they DO get more sleep when they are allowed a later school start time.

As the past president of the Maryland Sleep Society, I know that this issue is at the forefront of our concerns regarding bringing the benefits of healthy sleep to everyone in our community.

And as a mother of two athletic and academically successful young adults, I can tell you that the consequences of starting high school at 7:15 include chronic exhaustion. Watching your kid come home at the end of the week, and sleep until they have to get up for the next meet, game or practice, only to have an even harder time falling asleep on Sunday nights is wrenching.

It is possible to realign our resources to allow our children to get more adequate sleep, and results across our country have shown the clear benefits. I strongly support legislation in our state to start school later.

Sincerely,

Katherine S. Maul Buki, MD, FCCP, FAASM