

Self-Medication

Students often compensate for inadequate sleep by seeking out stimulants like coffee, energy drinks, tea, soda, and other caffeine- and sugar-based consumables. A 2014 survey of 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students found that approximately 30 percent of students consume energy drinks or shots; more than 40 percent reported daily regular soft drink use, and about 20 percent reported daily diet soft drink use.²¹ Though these stimulants are intended to keep the student awake, they often cause the student to sleep less overall due to the known sleep-disrupting effects of caffeine, which can lead to a cycle of sleep loss leading to caffeine intake, leading to more sleep loss, and so on.

Academic, Social, and Time Pressures

Adolescents face numerous stressors including academic demands, social pressures, and conflicts with parents and concerns about their future. Adolescents from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds face additional stressors stemming from poverty, living in unsafe neighborhoods, and food security, to name a few. These additional academic and social pressures as well as afterschool activities take up time in students' schedules which can cause them to get even less sleep. Homework, athletic practices, performing arts practices, and tutoring can all consume many hours of the average high school student's day. Many students also hold afterschool jobs to financially assist their families or save for college. Time to relax and socialize with friends can also eat away at available sleep hours.

Affect and Mood

Affect is often described in terms of positive and negative in which positive affect refers to joy, contentment, and engagement whereas negative affect refers to anger, fear, and sadness.³⁷ Adequate sleep has been found to contribute to improved affect.³⁸ Conversely, sleep deprivation has been found to increase negative affect and decrease positive affect.³⁹

Anxiety

Researchers have found that sleep disturbance can give rise to the development of an anxiety disorder. For example, persistent insomnia is associated with an increased risk of developing an anxiety disorder⁴⁰ and sleep disturbance often predicts the subsequent development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.⁴¹ Research testing the correlation between sleep loss and anxiety have found that healthy participants report an increase in anxiety following a night of sleep deprivation.⁴² These findings, when compounded with low levels of sleep in adolescents, indicate that adolescents may experience heightened anxiety as a result of sleep deprivation.

