The importance of sleep for teens

Today’s American teenagers are not getting enough sleep. Most high schools begin at 7:20 a.m., setting wake-up time during the week. Because of changes in their body clocks, many teens feel exhausted by mid-afternoon, then somehow perk up at night and just can’t fall asleep much before 10 or 11 p.m. But the fact remains that teens need between 8½ and 9¼ hours of sleep each night!

The impact of too little teen sleep is both obvious (crabbiness, inattention, drowsiness) and surprising (pimples; cravings for foods, especially carbs; obesity). Another important aspect is the effect of sleep on learning and memory. Research shows that during sleep, the brain consolidates and practices what was learned during the day. That means that sleep after a lesson is as important as a good night’s sleep before a big test, and learning a new task (whether sports or music) is enhanced by sleep.

To improve sleep, teens can keep their bedrooms dark, cool, and quiet. Getting lots of daylight, being active, having a set bedtime and staying away from exercise, Internet and television shortly before bed all help, too.

Naps are great, but teens need short, power naps during the week and should sleep only an extra two hours on weekends.

Sleep is as vital to good health as eating and exercise. The sooner parents help their children form good sleep habits, the easier it will be to uphold them during the teen years.

Prayer: Rest is important, God, but I don’t always honor that. Help me make the most of this life you have given me. Remind me to care for myself fully and be a better example for others. Amen.

Resources: advocatehealth.com • kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/take_care/how_much_sleep.html (How Much Sleep Do I Need?) • sleepfoundation.org/what-makes-good-nights-sleep • ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528821 (Teens and Sleep) • nytimes.com/2011/05/31/health/31brody.html (A Good Night’s Sleep Isn’t a Luxury - It’s a Necessity)

Practical Guide to the Affordable Care Act
Top things for those with health concerns to know

1. Starting next year, the Affordable Care Act guarantees that all Americans – regardless of their health status or pre-existing conditions – will have access to quality, affordable coverage. On Oct. 1, when open enrollment begins, people can apply for affordable health insurance coverage choices in Health Insurance Marketplaces that will offer a choice of quality, affordable health plans. Coverage begins on Jan. 1, 2014. Visit healthcare.gov/marketplace to learn more.

2. If a new insurance plan doesn’t pay for services you believe were covered, you now have clear options to appeal the decision. If you don’t speak English, you may be entitled to receive appeals information in your native language.

3. Insurance companies can no longer drop you when you get sick solely because you made an honest mistake on your coverage application. (Your insurance company can still rescind coverage if you intentionally put false or incomplete information on your insurance application, and it can cancel your coverage if you fail to pay your premiums on time.)

4. Starting in 2014, if your income is less than the equivalent of about $88,000 for a family of four today and your job doesn’t offer affordable coverage, you may get tax credits to help pay for insurance.

5. Starting in 2014, job-based and new individual plans won’t be able to exclude you from coverage or charge you a higher premium for a pre-existing condition, including a disability.

If you have insurance and have problems with your plan or questions about your coverage, you can get help through the Consumer Assistance Program. Its walk-in location is 100 Randolph St, 9th Floor, Chicago, IL 60601. Call 877.527.9431, or visit insurance.illinois.gov to learn more.

Kaiser Family Foundation (kff.org) and Healthcare.gov are the sources for the above information. Please refer to those sites for further explanation and clarification.

June focus: Seniors