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Why kids need their sleep

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AN early night can work wonders for kids with striking new research showing sleep can reduce BMI just as well as exercise.

As over-scheduled families struggle to find time for healthy activities for children, Australian scientists have discovered that while physical exercise gives premium all around health and wellbeing, children can achieve the same 7.4 per cent reduction in body mass index by either exercising 17 more minutes a day or sleeping an extra 52 minutes or reducing their sitting or sedentary time by an extra 56 minutes.

The findings come from the University of South Australia, in partnership with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and supported by the National Heart Foundation of Australia. The study assessed 1179 children aged 11-12 years.

"International guidelines suggest that children need nine to 11 hours' sleep, 60 minutes of physical exercise and no more than two hours of recreational screen time per day, yet only 7 per cent of children are regularly meeting these goals," lead researcher UniSA's Dr Dot Dumuid said.

"With so many competing priorities and commitments, it's helpful to know which activities deliver the greatest 'bang for your buck'."

Sleep consultant Amanda Bude said the findings show the need for time poor parents to navigate different options for their kids.

"Sleep health is not just about the physical characteristics of health but also the mental health safety of our teens. Lack of sleep can have a negative impact on emotional development and manifest in mental health issues like anxiety and depression and risk-taking behaviour," she said.

"It is so important that parents are able to help their children navigate the over scheduling of their busy lives and keep healthy as well. As a child enters the teenage years their circadian clock starts to set later and later and finding a balance is essential."

Sunshine Coast mum of four Cindy Buswell believes that if she keeps her children active every day then a good night's sleep follows.

"Good sleep and exercise should go hand-in-hand not one or the other," she said.