

Why sleep matters — from classrooms to lecture halls

Whether you're revising for GCSEs or sitting final-year exams at university, one thing is true for all learners: sleep matters. Rest is the body's reset button — essential not just for staying alert during the day, but for memory, emotional balance, and academic performance.

And yet, many young people aren't getting the rest they need. Surveys suggest that 75% of university students identify as poor sleepers, and studies show that school-age children and teenagers are increasingly sleep-deprived, too — often going to bed late and struggling to switch off from screens or stress.

What's at stake when sleep suffers?

Lack of quality sleep can affect both pupils and students in several ways:

- Trouble focusing or processing information
- Reduced memory retention and lower academic achievement
- Increased stress, anxiety, and emotional ups and downs
- Weakened immunity and more frequent illness
- A knock-on effect on self-confidence, motivation, and general wellbeing

During exam periods especially, sleep deprivation can build up quickly — making revision harder and leaving young people feeling overwhelmed, no matter their age.

Better sleep, better learning

Creating a healthier sleep routine can have a big impact on learning, wellbeing, and how young people feel overall. Here are a few simple strategies that can help both pupils and students sleep better:

1. **Keep a regular bedtime** — going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, even on weekends
2. **Limit screens before bed** — the blue light from phones, tablets, and TVs can make it harder to wind down
3. **Avoid caffeine late in the day** — that includes fizzy drinks and energy drinks
4. **Create a calm sleep environment** — keep the bedroom dark, quiet, and comfortable
5. **Use relaxing wind-down routines** — such as reading, journaling, or guided breathing
6. **Get outdoors in natural daylight** — especially in the morning, to help regulate the body's sleep cycle
7. **Exercise regularly** — even a short walk can support better sleep and mental clarity

These changes don't need to happen all at once. Building better habits gradually — even one or two at a time — can make a real difference.

A helpful guide for university students

For those in higher education, a helpful place to start is the guide "[Sleeping Habits at University](#)" from Dunelm. It includes more than 40 practical tips on improving rest in student accommodation, managing exam pressure, and creating an environment that supports deep, restorative sleep — all designed with student life in mind.

Useful Links

[Teen Sleep Hub](#) — Dedicated advice and free resources to help teenagers understand sleep and how to improve it.

[YoungMinds: Sleep and Mental Health](#) — Covers the link between sleep and mental health, with advice tailored for young people.

The Sleep Council (Now Part of The Sleep Charity)— Information and downloadable sleep plans to support healthy rest for all ages.

Student Minds: Managing Sleep at University— A mental health resource for university students with tips for creating healthy routines.

BBC Bitesize: How sleep can help you study — Simple, accessible tips aimed at secondary school students, especially during exam season.

Final thoughts

Sleep isn't just important — it's foundational to learning, health, and resilience. Whether you're a parent of a child facing SATs, a sixth-form student preparing for A-levels, or in university juggling coursework and exams, making time for rest can be one of the most powerful tools for success.

By encouraging young people to value sleep as much as they value their studies, we're not only helping them perform better now, but also teaching them to care for their wellbeing in the long term.

Related Links

- [Teen Sleep Hub](#)
- [YoungMinds: Sleep and Mental Health](#)
- [The Sleep Council \(Now Part of The Sleep Charity\)](#)
- [Student Minds: Managing Sleep at University](#)
- [BBC Bitesize: How sleep can help you study](#)
- [Sleeping habits at university](#)



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