

## Sleep: The Tie That Binds

*Imagine this family: Mavis and Mark with twins Elliot and Emma. The kids are 12 years old and in grade 6. They get up each morning tired and cranky, complaining that they are too tired for school. After breakfast they rush out the door (7:40 am) for a 30 minute bus ride to school and return home at 3:30pm. Mom and Dad are working, so at this age, the twins are told to stay inside until a parent is home (5:00pm). While at home, Elliot plays X-box and Emma is on her phone snap-chatting and texting friends. Evenings are busy: twice a week Elliot has swimming, Emma has dance; they take music lessons together at a local instructor's house on Wednesdays. Mavis goes to zumba once a week and Mark is a volunteer firefighter, so he has weekly meetings and events. Homework is usually late getting started and late getting finished. After showers and a bedtime snack, Elliot goes to bed and watches T.V. in his room, while Emma is a reader. It is now nearly 11:00 pm. Mavis, Mark, Elliot and Emma are all hoping to 'catch-up' on their sleep on the weekend. Sound familiar?*

ParticipACTION has just released its 2016 report card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. This report card highlights the **Sleepidemic** that Canadian children and youth are living with. Canadian kids are not getting enough physical activity in their waking hours. Only 9% of 5 to 17-year-olds reach the target of 60 minutes of heart-pumping physical activity six days a week. It is unlikely that Elliot and Emma get this much activity outside of their swimming and dance lessons. Also, 76% of five to 17-year-olds clock in more than two hours each day of sedentary recreational screen time. In the scenario above, it is easy to see how Elliot and Emma, like so many kids in today's society, have lots of sitting time on the bus, at school, after school and through the evenings. The resulting cycle is that kids are not active enough to be tired for sleep and are too sleepy for activities throughout their day.

The decrease in physical activity and increase in sedentary activities impacts both the quality and quantity of sleep that children are getting. Beyond being tired and cranky, kids show fatigue in different ways. Some effects of lack of sleep among kids include hyperactivity, impulsiveness and a short attention span. Children with too little sleep are more likely to struggle with verbal creativity and problem solving and generally score lower on IQ tests. Sleep is critical for hormone regulation and body maintenance. Without good sleep habits, children and youth face an increased risk of obesity, diabetes and hypertension, as well as mental health issues such as depression and suicidal thoughts.

A healthy childhood requires a balance of physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep. Canada has developed the world's first 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth. The condensed recommendations are:

- 60 minutes per day of heart-pumping physical activity;
- several hours of light physical activities;
- 9 to 11 hours of sleep for children five to 13, 8 to 10 hours per night for youth 14 to 17, with the same bedtime and wake-up times every day;
- No more than two hours per day of recreation screen time for any age group.

*Update: Emma & Elliot have established a set bedtime at 9:30 pm. Arrangements have been made with a neighbouring family so that Emma & Elliot can play outside after school*

*with a set of rules and someone to contact for help if necessary. Dad has removed the television from Elliot's bedroom and Emma has to read earlier to have lights out on time. On weekends, the family is getting up at 8:00 am and planning one physical activity for the entire family to do together. This week, they are signing up for a Kids Live Well Marathon in their community.*

As writer Thomas Dekker (1572-1632) has said, "Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together." Kids can be active and still sleep-deprived. Others can be well rested yet not active enough. It is a balance we must strive to achieve for the health and well-being of our children and the entire family.

More information about Canada's 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth can be found at [www.participation.com](http://www.participation.com). Take a step in the right direction by adding physical activity to your own and your children's daily lifestyle! Start by slowly increasing your physical activity to meet the Canadian Physical Activity Recommendations (<http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>). If being active is new for you, please speak to your family physician before adding physical activity to your daily routine. For information about resources and programs to support physical activity among children and youth in the Western Region, such as the Kids Live Well Marathon, please contact Regional Health Education Consultant, Tanya Barnes Matthews at [tanyamatthews@westernhealth.nl.ca](mailto:tanyamatthews@westernhealth.nl.ca).