

MEDIA RELEASE

**Dreaming of a white (and restful!) Christmas
Better to keep sleep disruptions to a minimum
for kids over the holidays**

Montreal, Thursday, December 16, 2010 – Researchers at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute have demonstrated that consistently longer sleeps in healthy school-age children (between 7 and 11 years) were associated with a better performance on IQ tests. Good performance was associated with an average sleep time of 10 hours. Parties, concerts and late-night activities may not make for the perfect holiday season when it comes to children’s academic performance!

Longer sleep time makes a difference

In a recent study published in *Sleep Medicine*, Reut Gruber, PhD, and her colleagues, have found that longer habitual sleep duration in healthy school-age participants is associated with better performance on measures of perceptual reasoning and overall IQ. “Our results aren’t that surprising. The most common direct consequence of insufficient or disrupted sleep is increased daytime sleepiness,” says Gruber. “This, in turn, leads to reduced alertness and compromises the daytime functioning of specific brain areas that underlie key processes required for academic success.”

Stay away from too many disruptions in sleep time

Although it may be difficult before the holidays and during the height of the season, it would be better if kids did not lose too many hours of sleep. “Sleep loss is very treatable,” says Gruber. “By improving sleep we can optimize and improve performance and academic success of our children.” She also suggests being careful not to change bedtime every night. When sleep habits are disrupted over a few consecutive nights, the cumulative effect becomes akin to jetlag!

Adopting good sleep habits: an excellent New Year resolution

“Steps such as setting sleep as a priority in the household, having a consistent bedtime throughout the year and having a quiet, cool bedroom will go a long way to improving our children’s attention and enthusiasm.”

40 Minutes of sleep time also makes a difference for children with ADHD

An estimated 25 to 50 percent of children and adolescents with attention deficit with or without hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience sleep problems. Other findings of Gruber and her colleagues showed that just an average of 40.7 minutes less sleep every night over 6 days worsened daytime ADHD symptoms.

“Our main finding was that cumulative reduction in sleep duration of just 40 minutes was associated with detectable deterioration in vigilance and sustained attention, in both healthy controls and children with ADHD,” says Gruber. “In ADHD children this decline in performance led to a diagnostic change, from the subclinical range to the clinical range.”

Sleep deprivation: a youth health issue

According to Reut Gruber, the significance of sleep insufficiency is under-recognized with respect to youth health. She says: “Sleep deprivation is linked to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular problems. In addition, poor sleep has been shown to impair academic performance, learning, memory and functions essential for academic success. Moreover, inadequate sleep interferes with mood and affects mood regulation.”

Partners in research

The Douglas Institute Foundation is proud to support Reut Gruber, PhD, and her research in mental health. The Foundation thanks its donors and volunteers for their generosity and thoughtfulness. Together, we invest in healthy minds.

Gruber’s research is also funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), the Fonds de la recherche en santé du Québec (FRSQ) and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI).

About the Douglas – www.douglas.qc.ca

The Douglas is a world-class institute affiliated with McGill University and the World Health Organization. Its mission is to treat people suffering from mental illness and offer them both hope and healing. The Institute’s teams of specialists and researchers continually advance scientific knowledge, integrate it into patient care, and share it with the community to increase awareness and thus eliminate stigma around mental illness.