

Sleep among BC youth



This fact sheet identifies challenges youth might experience to getting at least 8 hours of sleep and uninterrupted sleep, as well as factors associated with getting a better night's sleep.

Data were analyzed from the 38,488 students, aged 12–19, who completed the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). To learn more about the survey, please visit mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs.

Quotes from youth who filled out the survey are included throughout this fact sheet.

Introduction

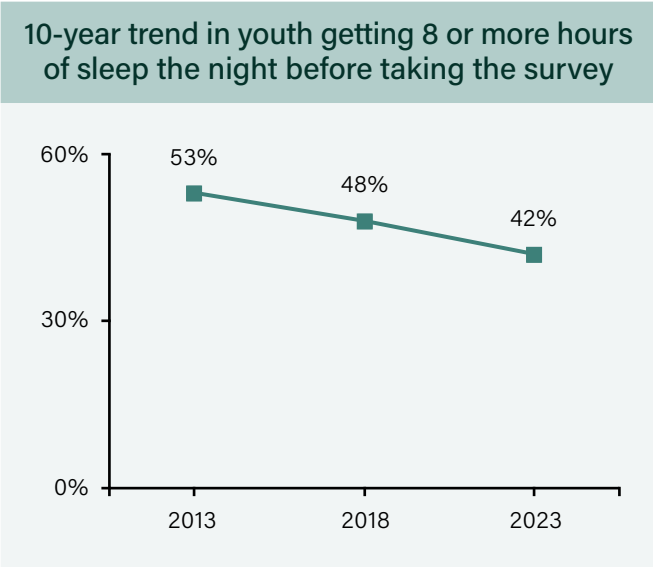
Getting enough sleep and good quality sleep are important for youth's physical and mental health (Castiglione-Fontanellaz et al., 2023). Insufficient sleep, particularly on school days, is common among young people in many countries, and youth are getting less sleep than in the past (Garipey et al., 2020; Twenge et al., 2017). Reduced sleep among youth has been linked to factors such as a rise in the use of social media and specific apps in the hour before bed (Mireku et al., 2019; Pillion et al., 2022).

Previous studies have identified associations between sleep quality and peer, family, and school supports among youth (Delaruelle et al., 2021). Spending time with family and friends can enhance youth's well-being, which in turn has been found to help improve youth's sleep (Hedin et al., 2020; Sasser et al., 2021). Also, caregiver rules around bedtime, including moderating the use of social media and the Internet (van den Eijnden et al., 2021; Gunn et al., 2019), and participation in physical activity (Baldursdottir et al., 2017; Hedin et al., 2020) have been found to be associated with youth getting good quality sleep.

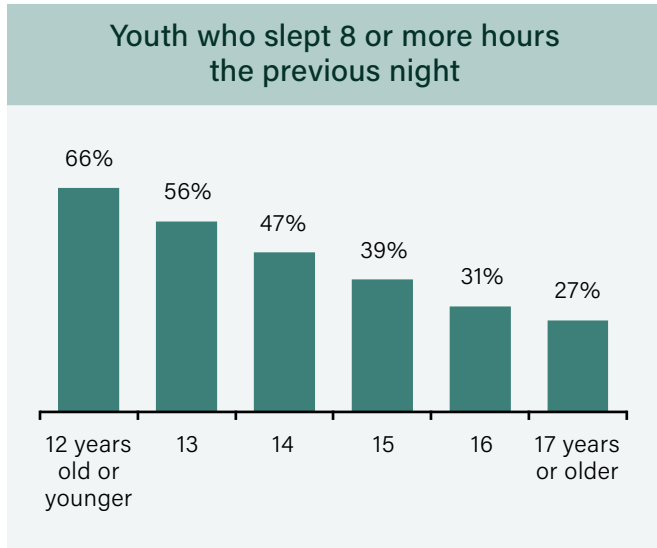
Canadian sleep guidelines recommend that children and youth aged 5 to 13 get 9 to 11 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night, and that older youth get 8 to 10 hours of uninterrupted sleep (Tremblay et al., 2016).

Youth's sleep the previous night

The night before completing the 2023 BC AHS, a minority of youth (42%) had slept for at least 8 hours. Youth in 2023 were less likely than those in previous survey years to have slept for 8 or more hours.



Males were the most likely to have slept for at least 8 hours the previous night (47% vs. 37% of females vs. 26% of non-binary youth), as were younger youth.



Around a quarter of youth (26%) reported their sleep was interrupted the previous night (41% of non-binary youth vs. 29% of females vs. 22% of males). Youth aged 17 or older were more likely than those aged 16 or younger to experience interrupted sleep (28% vs. 25%).

“I’m normally up many times in the night and get 4-6 hours of sleep.”

15-year-old youth

“My dogs [interrupted my sleep].”

16-year-old youth

“[My sleep was interrupted by] my cat & TV.”

12-year-old youth

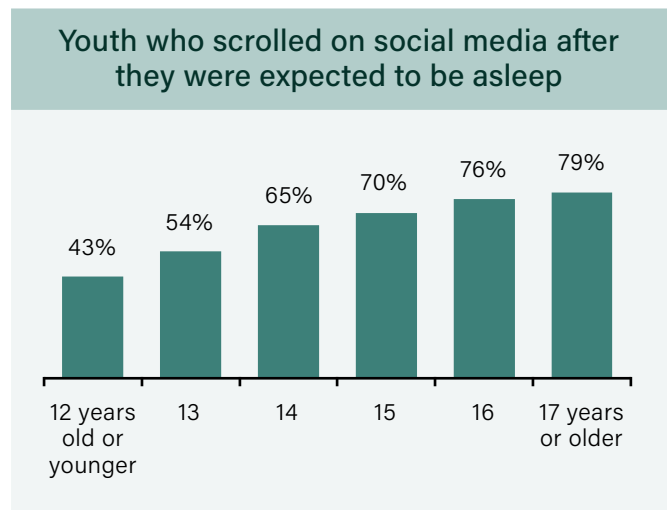
Activities youth engaged in after they were expected to be asleep

Most youth (86%) engaged in at least one activity after their expected bedtime, including 63% who engaged in three or more activities. They most commonly reported scrolling through social media and doing other things online such as watching videos.

Activities youth engaged in after they were expected to be asleep

Scrolling through social media	67%
Chatting or texting	60%
Doing homework	51%
Gaming (other than esports)	30%
Playing/watching esports	20%
Doing other things online (e.g., watching videos)	66%

Older youth were more likely than younger youth to engage in activities after they were expected to be asleep. For example, they were more likely to chat or text (e.g., 69% of 16-year-olds vs. 57% of 14-year-olds vs. 38% of those aged 12 or younger), do their homework (e.g., 61% of those aged 17 or older vs. 51% of 15-year-olds vs. 40% of 13-year-olds), and scroll through social media. Also, youth aged 14 or older were more likely than younger youth to be playing esports (21% vs. 17% of those aged 13 or younger) and gaming other than esports (31% vs. 27%) after their expected bedtime.



Challenges to getting a better night's sleep

"On most days I don't get enough sleep."

16-year-old youth

"I'm sleeping with four other siblings, and I don't have any privacy in the room."

14-year-old youth

Some youth were more likely to get poorer sleep, including those who:

- **Experienced food insecurity** (48% of those who went to bed hungry at least sometimes because there was not enough money for food reported sleep interruption vs. 24% of youth who never went to bed hungry).
- **Were deprived of a quiet place to sleep** (21% slept for 8 or more hours the previous night vs. 43% of those who had a quiet place to sleep).
- **Consumed energy drinks the previous day** (29% slept for 8 or more hours vs. 44% of those who did not have energy drinks).
- **Experienced extreme stress in the past month** (20% slept for 8 or more hours vs. 45% of those who did not experience this level of stress).
- **Engaged in activities after the time they were expected to be asleep.** For example, 27% of those who scrolled through social media after bedtime reported sleep interruption vs. 23% of those who did not scroll through social media at night. Also, 36% of those who engaged in gaming after bedtime slept for 8 or more hours vs. 44% of those who did not game at that time.

Youth more likely to get a full night's sleep

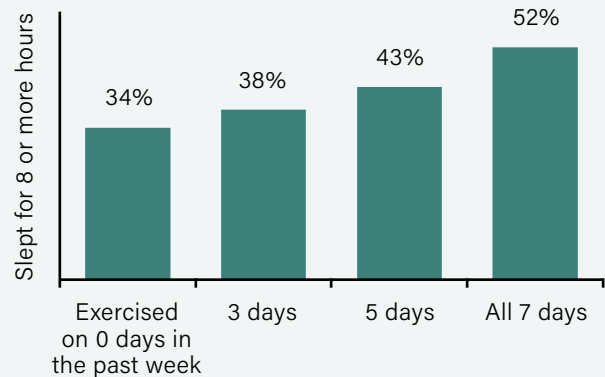
This section identifies activities, supports, and other experiences that increased youth's likelihood of getting at least 8 hours of sleep and uninterrupted sleep.

Involvement in physical activity

Engaging regularly in sports and other exercise was associated with youth getting more hours of sleep. For example, 45% of those who engaged at least weekly in informal sports (without a coach or instructor) had slept for at least 8 hours the previous night, compared to 37% of those who participated less often or not at all.

Youth who exercised on at least 3 days in the past week were more likely to have slept 8 or more hours the previous night, compared to those who exercised on fewer days. Youth who exercised every day in the past week were the most likely to have slept for at least 8 hours.

The more days on which youth exercised in the past week, the more likely they were to have slept at least 8 hours the previous night

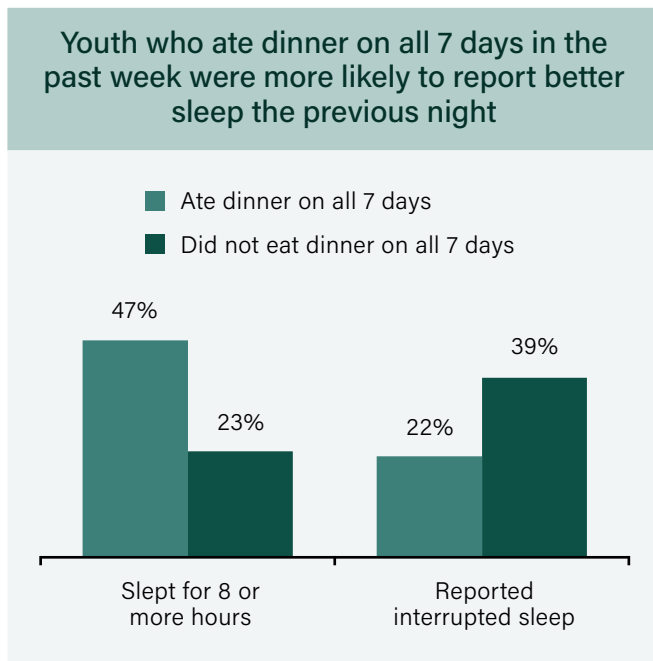


Note: Exercise refers to engaging in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Healthy eating

Having access to healthy food and consistent meals was associated with better sleep. For example, youth who ate fruit, vegetables, or salad the previous day were more likely than those who did not eat these foods to get at least 8 hours of sleep (44% vs. 29%), and were less likely to report interrupted sleep (25% vs. 31%) that night.

Those who had access to meals on all 7 days in the past week were more likely to report better sleep. For example, youth who ate dinner every day were more likely to have slept 8 or more hours, and were less likely to have experienced interrupted sleep the previous night.



Stress management

“It is difficult for me to eat food and sleep due to stress and anxiety.”

17-year-old youth

Among youth who experienced stress, those who felt they managed their stress well or very well were more likely to sleep for at least 8 hours, and less likely to report interrupted sleep.



These findings were also consistent among youth who experienced extreme levels of stress in the past month (e.g., 27% of those who experienced extreme stress and managed it well or very well had slept for at least 8 hours vs. 19% who managed their stress only fairly well or poorly).

No activities after bedtime

“I don’t have time to do anything at home except homework. I go to sleep late because of it.”

14-year-old youth

As mentioned previously, most youth (86%) engaged in activities after the time they were expected to be asleep (scrolling through social media, playing/watching esports, etc.). Those who went offline and engaged in none of the activities they were asked about were more likely to report sleeping for at least 8 hours (74% vs. 37% of those who engaged in activities after bedtime) and were less likely to report interrupted sleep (20% vs. 27%).

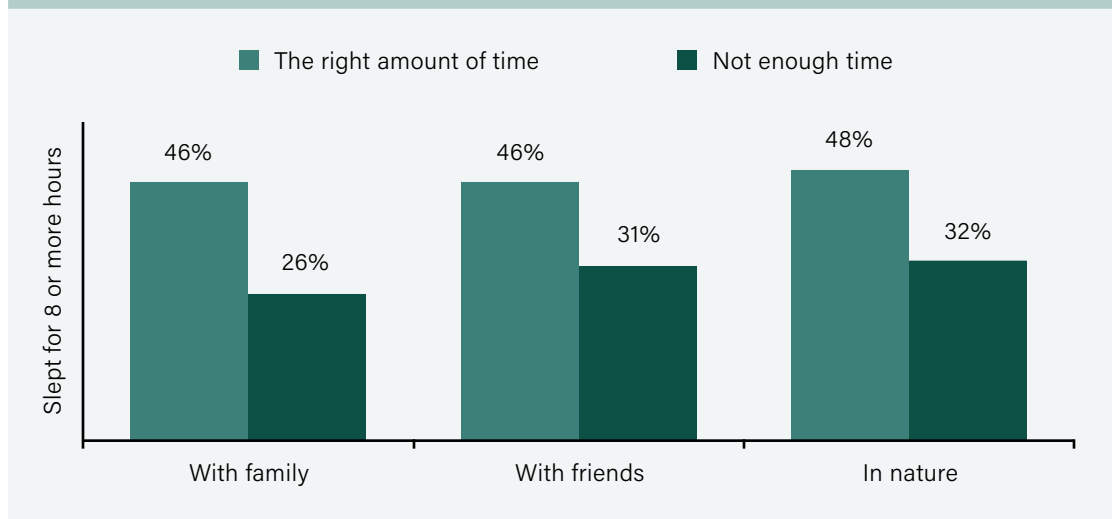
Had enough time to spend with others and in nature

“I feel I don’t get enough sleep, exercise, or time with family and friends because of homework.”

17-year-old youth

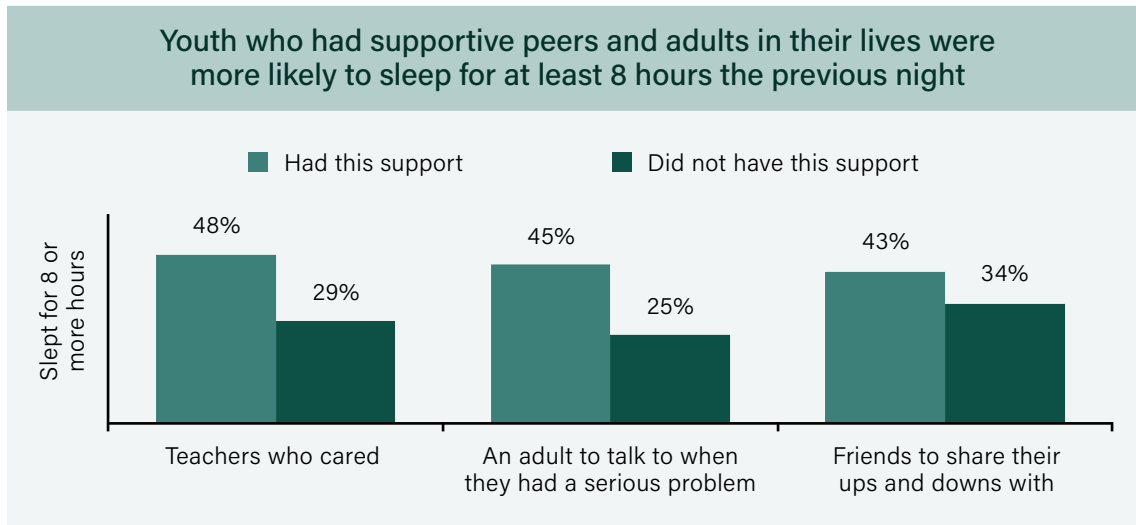
Youth who felt they had enough time to do the things they wanted with their family, friends, and in nature were more likely to report better sleep. For example, 22% of those who spent the right amount of time in nature reported experiencing sleep interruption the previous night, compared to 30% who felt they spent insufficient time in nature.

Youth who felt they spent the right amount of time doing the things they wanted were more likely to get at least 8 hours sleep the previous night



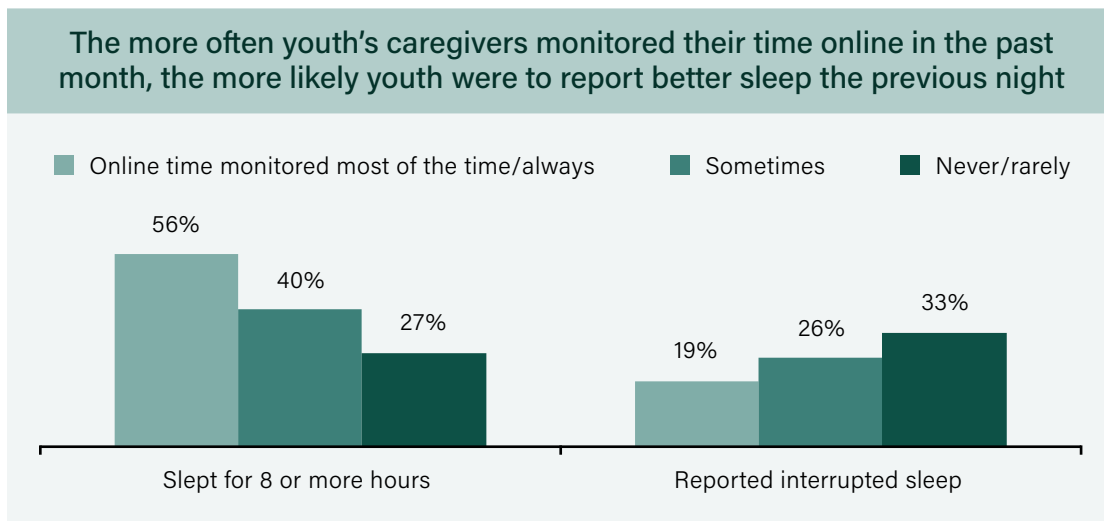
Supportive adults and peers

Youth who had friends and adults to turn to for support were more likely to report better sleep. For example, youth who had an adult to help them with their homework were less likely to be doing homework after bedtime (50% vs. 54% who did not have such an adult), and were more likely to sleep for 8 or more hours (47% vs. 25%).



Caregiver monitoring

Youth with caregivers who monitored their free time were more likely to report better sleep. For example, 22% of those who felt their free time was monitored by their caregiver most or all of the time in the past month reported sleep interruption the previous night, compared to 43% who felt their free time was rarely or never monitored. Caregiver monitoring of youth's time online was also associated with better sleep.



Youth's requests for education about sleep

Youth who completed the 2023 BC AHS were asked if there were any topics that affected their health and well-being that they wanted to learn more about. Sleep was a common topic they wanted to receive more education about.

"[I want to learn about the] importance of sleep."

17-year-old youth

"Sleep and how it affects you."

14-year-old youth

"How lack of sleep affects students."

17-year-old youth

"How can I improve sleep quality?"

17-year-old youth

"How to sleep effectively."

18-year-old youth

"Precise sleeping illnesses and causes/treatments."

17-year-old youth

Final thoughts

This fact sheet has described youth's experiences with sleep, including challenges to sleep and factors associated with youth getting at least 8 hours of sleep and uninterrupted sleep.

This research and other studies suggest that youth can be supported to improve their sleep by:

- Fostering healthy behaviours, such as eating consistent, nutritious meals; engaging in regular physical activity; avoiding energy drinks; and avoiding sugary and fatty foods, particularly near bedtime.
- Implementing strategies to help cope with stress, such as mindfulness and relaxation techniques.
- Balancing school work with spending time with supportive friends and family.
- Practicing good sleep hygiene, such as keeping a consistent bedtime routine; keeping lights low in the evening; switching off devices; and avoiding stressful tasks like homework after their expected bedtime.

Resources

Kids help phone sleep diary

Provides a way for youth to track their sleep habits and to explore what they can do to improve their sleep. kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/sleep-diary.

Kelty Mental Health

Offers information on the importance of sleeping well. keltymentalhealth.ca/sleeping-well.

Foundry

Provides information about sleep. foundrybc.ca/topic-page/sleep-the-basics/.

Teen Sleep Hub

Offers tips for youth to get a good night's sleep. teenslephub.org.uk/.

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