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the Voyager

Got Sleep? *Sleep deprivation triggers problems among teenagers*

ALLISON BIVIN
NEWS WRITER

In every high school there is always at least one student who repeatedly falls asleep during class. However, the pool of drool may not be flowing due to boredom. Insomnia is becoming a chronic problem for teenagers, but it is often overlooked. Research shows that insomnia not only affects concentration and performance but can also lead to substance abuse and physiological problems.

"[Insomnia] happens to more kids than it does not. It's more prevalent [but] a lot of time, all people think they need to do is clear their mind or go to sleep. They think it isn't that big of a deal," Advanced Placement Psychology teacher Lauren Chasey said.

In order for teens to function properly during the day they need at least eight hours of sleep each night, but according to CNN only 15 percent of teenagers actually get the proper amount of sleep on a regular basis. More than a quarter of the teens surveyed by CNN said that they sleep about six hours or less on a daily basis. In a *Voyager* survey of 173 students, 73 percent said that they received an average of five to seven hours of sleep.

Insomnia can be triggered by stress, the inability to relax, distractions such as television or movies, and caffeine. Often sleep slips to the bottom of the list of things to do. Jobs, school, extra-curricular activities, and friends take priority.

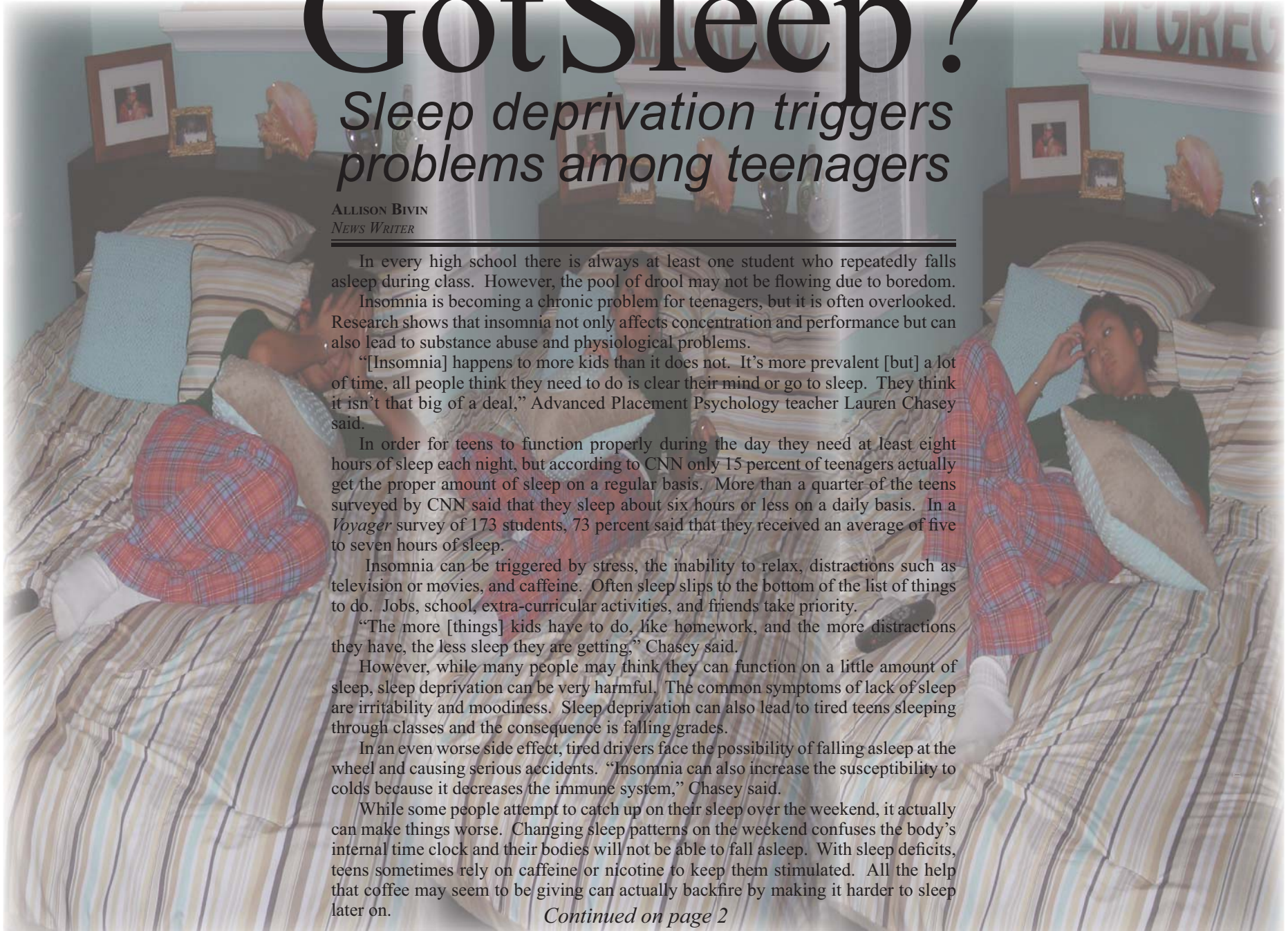
"The more [things] kids have to do, like homework, and the more distractions they have, the less sleep they are getting," Chasey said.

However, while many people may think they can function on a little amount of sleep, sleep deprivation can be very harmful. The common symptoms of lack of sleep are irritability and moodiness. Sleep deprivation can also lead to tired teens sleeping through classes and the consequence is falling grades.

In an even worse side effect, tired drivers face the possibility of falling asleep at the wheel and causing serious accidents. "Insomnia can also increase the susceptibility to colds because it decreases the immune system," Chasey said.

While some people attempt to catch up on their sleep over the weekend, it actually can make things worse. Changing sleep patterns on the weekend confuses the body's internal time clock and their bodies will not be able to fall asleep. With sleep deficits, teens sometimes rely on caffeine or nicotine to keep them stimulated. All the help that coffee may seem to be giving can actually backfire by making it harder to sleep later on.

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More tired teens turn to use of sleeping pills

LIZ PALMER
NEWS WRITER

Many high school students suffer from a lack of sleep around final exams and other stressful situations, but instead of trying to relax and get more sleep naturally more teenagers are turning to different medications to deal with sleep deprivation.

An estimated 180,000 American teenagers are taking sleeping pills every night to try to get more sleep, according to a study by Medco Health Solutions.

Not only can sleep deprivation be caused by large amounts of homework and no time to do it, but many teenagers also suffer from insomnia, which can be caused by anything from stress to changes in your body clock.

"When I get really stressed out from school, sports, or anything I have trouble sleeping. Sometimes I'd be getting around three hours of sleep a night, and then I would be really tired at school.

The next night I'd take a sleeping pill to be able to go to bed earlier and get more sleep," Senior Katie Tangri said.

About 20 million Americans suffer from insomnia, and prescriptions for sleeping pills have risen by almost 60 percent in the past six years, according to a study by TNS Media.

Although this may seem like a good temporary solution to get more sleep, sleeping pills can cause many health problems. Sleeping aids such as over-the-counter Tylenol PM or prescription Lunesta, are supposed to improve quality of sleep. However, they only

promote drowsiness. Diphenhydramine is an over-the-counter medicine present in many different types of sleep aids.

"Diphenhydramine is commonly used for allergy symptoms and can make you very tired. Teenage use of sleeping aids is not a good idea, because it only makes them tired and does not help the quality of their night's sleep. It will most likely cause them to be drowsier and less alert in class the next morning," Physician August Martinucci said.

Another negative effect of sleeping pills is the tendency for users to acquire a long term chemical

dependency on the pills. Once someone starts using the medication for a prolonged time, the pills can become highly addictive.

"Similar to the affects of alcohol or nicotine on teenagers, sleeping pill usage can be difficult to stop too. One way to know if you are dependant is if you stop using the pills and your body still cannot sleep or relax at night," Martinucci said.

Instead of taking pills to fall asleep, the National Sleep Foundation suggests different healthy sleep habits. Teenagers should avoid caffeine late in the day, maintain a regular sleep pattern (even on the weekends), exercise regularly, and not eat for at least two to three hours before going to sleep.

"After I took a sleeping pill I would wake up feeling very groggy and just as tired as before. Now, I just know that by a certain time at night I need to lie down so I can be alert and refreshed when I wake up in the morning," Tangri said.



Caution!
Use of sleeping pills can cause...

- Long term chemical dependency
- Reduced brain cell activity
- Short term memory loss
- Hallucinations

Graphic by Liz Palmer
Source: Apollohealth.com