

## Tips for Teens with Narcolepsy: Improving Alertness

The sleepiness brought on by narcolepsy can be debilitating and overwhelming. However, many teens have learned to work with their narcolepsy and found simple things they can do to improve alertness.

### SOME STRATEGIES

- **Work with a doctor to optimize the timing and doses of medications.**  
This can help improve alertness across the school day and while studying later. Talk with your doctor regularly about how medications are working.
- **Stay active during classes.**  
Some teens find it useful to sit in the back of the class so they can stand up and walk around or get a drink. Others may find that being in the front of the room works best. Staying engaged in the material and asking questions can also help sustain alertness, as can doing something as simple as chewing sugar-free gum.
- **Take a 15- to 20-minute nap during the school day.**  
School administrators may be able to provide a place to do so, such as the nurse's office. Some people may tend toward longer naps, but it is often best to keep the nap short as longer naps can make it harder to sleep well at night. Experiment until you find what works best for you.
- **Plan a brief nap after school.**  
A brief nap before or between after-school activities can help sustain alertness later in the day.
- **Consider limits on after-school activities.**  
Evaluate after-school activities to determine if they are preventing you from getting enough sleep. Prioritize the ones you are most passionate about.
- **Remain active while studying.**  
Read while standing at a countertop, study in a cool room, or take a break and walk around every 20 minutes. Studying and discussing homework with fellow classmates can also help keep you alert.
- **Take an exercise break.**  
Exercise can improve alertness for 15–30 minutes afterwards.
- **Keep a regular sleep schedule.**  
Going to bed and waking at the same time each day, including weekends, can help you fall asleep and awaken more easily. Although challenging, this self-discipline is especially important in the often busy and sometimes chaotic years of high school and college.
- **Get enough sleep at night.**  
On average, children ages 5–12 need 10–11 hours of sleep, and teens ages 13–18 need 8.5–9.5 hours of sleep. Everyone feels sleepy if they don't get enough sleep, but this can hit teens with narcolepsy especially hard.