Yaaaawwwwnn! Are You Sleep-Deprived?
by Kathiann M. Kowalski

"Time to wake up for school," Bethany’s dad calls at 6:45 a.m. "Okay," Bethany responds softly. Then she rolls over to catch a few extra winks. When the alarm blares at 7 o’clock, Bethany can’t put it off any longer. Yawning, she shuts off the alarm and crawls out of bed.

Drowsy Nation

If you need an alarm clock to wake up in the morning, you’re probably sleep-deprived, too. In fact, most teens don’t get enough sleep, says the National Sleep Foundation. On average, American teens get two hours less than the average 9.2 hours of sleep they need each night for optimal functioning.

Teens are not alone. The National Sleep Foundation says that 63 percent of adults get less than their recommended 8 hours of sleep. Nearly one-third sleep less than 7 hours on weeknights.

"Most people in society view sleepiness and sleep deprivation as a minor annoyance," notes Mark Mahowald at the Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center. "You never brag about how much sleep you got. You only brag if you didn’t get very much.” Sadly, sleep deprivation causes serious problems.

Food, Clothing, Shelter . . . and SLEEP!

"Sleep is a basic biological need, just like food and drink," says Jodi Mindell at St. Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, PA. "Amazingly enough, you can go much longer without food and drink than you can go without sleep."

Why does your body need sleep? "We don’t know the answer to that," says Mindell. "But we do know that almost every species sleeps. And we also know what happens to our bodies if we do not sleep. So we kind of look at it in a backward way."

Grumpiness and irritability from sleep deprivation cause behavior problems at home and school. Lack of sleep also makes people more likely to feel down or depressed.

"The less you sleep, the more likely you are to have difficulty in school," notes Amy Wolfson at the College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA). You can’t learn math if you sleep during class. Even if you’re “awake,” sleepiness impairs concentration.

"We know that much learning and remembering occurs while you’re asleep," adds Mindell. Researchers don’t understand how, but the brain seems to process memories during sleep. Thus, students who get a good night’s sleep typically do better on tests than students who stayed up all night studying,
Behind the wheel, sleep deprivation can be deadly. “Fall-asleep car crashes probably kill more young Americans under the age of 25 than alcohol-related crashes,” observes Mahowald. And even if a tired driver doesn’t nod off, impaired concentration and coordination make accidents more likely.

More Consequences (Yawn!)

Not sleeping is bad for your health. “Your immune functioning gets depressed,” says Mindell, “so you’re more likely to get colds and flus.”

The body also secretes hormones during sleep, including growth hormone. Some studies suggest that a hormone imbalance in sleep-deprived people could accompany abnormal weight gain.

Emotional regulation suffers, too. “Sleep affects how well you can regulate your moods,” explains Mindell. Suppose someone says something mean. With sufficient sleep, you’d probably brush it off. “But if you’re sleepy, you can’t regulate your emotions,” says Mindell. “You’re going to burst out in tears, even if it’s an embarrassing situation.”

No one needs extra emotional upheaval—especially teens.

Why Aren’t We Sleeping?

Sleep disorders keep some people from sleeping. Insomnia, for example, is difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep no matter what time someone goes to bed. Sometimes insomnia relates to negative associations with going to bed. Other times, inability to sleep signals depression, anxiety disorder, or other psychological problems.

More often, poor sleep hygiene is to blame. That’s not whether you take a bath before bedtime. Rather, it’s your set of sleep/wake habits.

Most people probably just don’t get enough sleep because they try to cram more than 24 hours into each day. School starts early in most cities. Extracurricular activities last until early evening. Then there’s dinner, chores, and homework. Even on weekends, morning activities get students up early.

“Every which way the kids turn, something conspires to reduce their total sleep time,” complains Mahowald. And what teen wants to skip telephone calls, TV, and computer time?

To make matters worse, teens just aren’t ready to fall asleep as early as when they were younger. When you go to bed late and wake up early, there just aren’t enough hours for sleep.

Get Some Sleep!

What can you do about your sleep debt? “The good news is that you only have to make up about a third of what you lost,” says Mahowald, to function and feel better. Thus, sleeping an extra two hours on Saturday or Sunday can help tremendously.

Sleeping until noon, however, can cause other problems, warns Wolfson. Instead, aim for a regular sleep/wake schedule. To make the most of your sleep time, practice good sleep/wake habits.

Remember, sleep is not negotiable. Get your zzzzzz!
MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS

A.2.6.1

34. The main purpose of the first paragraph of the passage is to
   A. introduce the two major characters.
   B. summarize the main idea of the passage.
   C. interest readers by describing a familiar scene.
   D. let readers know how to avoid weight gain.

A.2.2.2

35. Read the sentence from the passage.
   "On average, American teens get two hours less than the average 9.2 hours of sleep they need each night for optimal functioning."
   What does the word optimal mean as used in the sentence?
   A. attractive
   B. technical
   C. poor
   D. ideal

A.2.4.1

36. What is the main idea of the section "Drowsy Nation"?
   A. Lack of sleep can cause health problems.
   B. Teenagers are too busy to get enough sleep.
   C. Few people get the amount of sleep they need.
   D. People should maintain a regular sleep schedule.

B.3.3.2

37. In which section would readers most likely find information about what causes sleep loss?
   A. "Food, Clothing, Shelter . . . and SLEEP!"
   B. "More Consequences (Yawn!)"
   C. "Why Aren't We Sleeping?"
   D. "Get Some Sleep!"
38. Lack of sleep affects mood because
   A sleep helps regulate emotions.
   B the brain processes memories during sleep.
   C sleepiness impairs concentration.
   D the body secretes growth hormones during sleep.

39. According to the passage, which is the best reason for students to get a good night's sleep before a test?
   A School starts very early in most places.
   B Proper rest supports emotional regulation.
   C Lack of sleep can cause grumpiness at school.
   D Learning and remembering occur during sleep.

40. Which statement from the passage best describes the main idea?
   A "More often, poor sleep hygiene is to blame."
   B "Sleep disorders keep some people from sleeping."
   C "Sadly, sleep deprivation causes serious problems."
   D "Behind the wheel, sleep deprivation can be deadly."
After reading this selection, determine the purpose of the writer. Was the writer’s intent to persuade, entertain, or inform? Give three examples from the selection to support your answer.