

# SLEEP-STARVED & STRESSED

They don't get enough sleep, and when they're awake they feel constantly stressed. That pretty much sums up what life feels like for American teenagers, according to a just-released study of 1,000 kids called *Teens Take on Health* (funded by the National 4-H Council). As much as the obesity problem among children in the U.S. has dominated the headlines, teenagers are just as concerned about their emotional and mental health.

Only 31 percent of American teenagers get the recommended eight hours of sleep a night, and sleep-related problems affect 25 to 40 percent of young people. In addition, there's a strong connection between sleep deprivation and stress—one out of five kids (18 percent) say they're more stressed when they don't get the sleep they need. Dr. Martha Molina Bernadett, family physician and founder of the Molina Foundation, says: "It really is a vicious cycle: sleep-deprivation leads to stress in school, including daytime drowsiness and poor school performance; emotional and mental stress, such as depression and mood problems; physical health problems, including obesity; and high-risk behaviors, such as substance abuse and drowsy driving."

Here's a sampler of findings from the *Teens Take On Health* report:

**1 Obesity is the top physical concern for American young people.** Kids say they know that their families need to eat healthier, drink more water, and exercise more to prevent and reduce obesity.

**2 Kids are savvier health-care consumers than you'd expect.** Teenagers recognize that their families need access to health care, that insurance is vital, and that health-care costs have skyrocketed.

**3 Teenagers recognize they need help with their physical and emotional health.** Kids in the study clearly recognized they need help managing and reducing their stress, and are concerned about mental health needs in their communities.

The National 4-H Council and Molina Healthcare invited 100 teenagers to a *Teens Take on Health* Action Summit, where kids proposed solutions that include...

- pushing back their school start-time;
- schools offering time management classes;
- agencies adopting public health guidelines to rein-in energy drink consumption among teenagers; and
- school districts adopting guidelines for after-school and extracurricular programs that are cognizant of adolescent development.