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A little more sleep helps kids with tests

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Getting just a little more sleep every night can help a child do better on memory and attention tests, a new study says.

The finding comes amid other research suggesting that the modern world's 24/7 approach to life has left Americans, including children, with a chronic sleep debt. The study's findings, if verified by additional research, suggest kids who get even a modest increase in sleep may get a big bonus in skills that translate to better grades.

Avi Sadeh, a sleep researcher at Tel Aviv University in Israel, and his colleagues knew that adults suffering from sleep deprivation often performed poorly on memory and attention tests, but not much research had been done with kids. So Sadeh and colleagues recruited 77 kids in the fourth and sixth grades.

The kids averaged less than nine

hours of sleep per night, an amount most researchers believe is sub par for their age. Most doctors recommend children get between nine and 11 hours of sleep a night.

Researchers gave the kids standard memory and attention tests. Then half the kids went to bed an hour earlier, and the rest went to bed an hour later than their usual times. Kids kept these sleep hours for three days and retook the tests.

Kids sent to bed an hour earlier got about 40 extra minutes of sleep a night. But that modest amount had an impact: They performed significantly better on tasks that required sustained attention and the ability to remember new information. Improvement was equivalent to a fourth-grader performing at the fifth-grade level, researchers say. In contrast, kids who had less sleep either lost ground or did the same on the tests.

The study is published in the journal *Child Development*.