

College Students and Sleep

Many college students underestimate the need for a good night's sleep. Due to the stresses of classes and jobs, the independence of living away from home, and a very active social scene that can be found on almost every campus, it is very easy to fall into a pattern of poor sleeping habits. Unfortunately, not getting enough sleep is more harmful than students might think.

Key Issues

According to www.sleep-deprivation.com, 47 million American adults—almost a quarter of the population—do not get enough sleep (approximately 8 hours per night). Getting this much sleep is extremely important, as being overtired can cause:

- ✓ Moodiness
- ✓ Higher susceptibility to illness
- ✓ Lack of energy
- ✓ Stress
- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Lack of concentration
- ✓ Difficulty retaining new information



Because of these effects, lack of adequate sleep often causes students' grades to drop—sometimes dramatically. Staying up late to study and then getting up early in the morning to do it again are counter-effective strategies.

Often, students are unaware that their sleep deprivation (which is usually self-inflicted) can cause them serious problems—they may be so used to being consistently sleepy that they don't realize their lack of sleep is unhealthy or abnormal.

Ways to Get Quality Sleep

The experts suggest a few simple tactics to help students increase the quality of their sleep.

- Get on a schedule. Falling asleep (and staying asleep) can sometimes be difficult, particularly in a residence hall setting. It is helpful to get to bed around the same time each night so your body gets used to a regular sleeping schedule.
- Don't make your bed a key study space. It comes highly recommended that activities like studying,

reading, and any other type of work or stress-related activity NOT be done while in bed. This presents a problem for students who

have only their beds and desk chairs in which to sit and complete their schoolwork. Thus, you can stress the importance of keeping a bed for *sleeping*: urge students to utilize common areas (if they are quiet enough) and the library instead. Chances are, they will get a lot more done in those places than they would in their rooms, anyway.

- Realize that a nightcap won't help the situation. A common misconception among students and non-students alike is that alcohol will help you sleep. Though drinking before bed may help some people *fall* asleep, it does not guarantee a quality night of sleep. Often, it causes the drinker to wake up several times during the night, which can be just as detrimental as only getting a few hours in the first place.
- Avoid watching the clock! Often, keeping an eye on your alarm clock can stress you out and make it even more difficult to fall asleep. Consider turning your clock around after you set your alarm, or putting it in a bedside drawer where you can hear your alarm in the morning but not see the time at night.
- Establish a relaxing routine (taking a bath, listening to music) to do about a half hour before bed.
- Consider using "white noise" to help you fall asleep (like a fan).
- Try to make your bed as comfortable as possible.
- Finish eating about two hours before bed.
- Avoid exercise right before bed—a workout in late afternoon is ideal, because it gives your body adequate time to cool down (and a dropping body temperature is what the brain associates with sleep).

Here's wishing your student a good night's sleep.

Sources: *The Centers for Disease Control*; www.sleep-foundation.org; www.sleep-deprivation.com

Sleepiness Scale

To help students determine if their level of fatigue is cause for concern, suggest that they fill out a simple "sleepiness scale" at www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000701-d000800/d000705/d000705.html.