

## Are You Getting Enough Sleep

### Who has time to sleep?

College students are notoriously sleep deprived. Not a big surprise. But sleep is **absolutely** necessary to function mentally and physically. Sleep deprivation can really affect your school performance. Lack of sleep impairs your ability to think and solve problems, it impairs your immune system function putting you more at risk for getting sick, and it increases your risk of accidents and mental health problems. Insomnia worsens ADHD, depression, anxiety and bipolar conditions.

### Definitions.

*Insomnia* is when you do not get enough sleep. This can be because of difficulty falling asleep, waking up frequently, a hard time falling back asleep or not feeling rested when you get up.

*Sleepiness* is when you can't stay awake. Your eye-lids feel heavy and are hard to keep open.

*Fatigue* is a feeling of tiredness characterized by lack of physical and psychological energy. Fatigue may or may not be relieved by sleep.

### What happens when I sleep?

Sleep is a circadian rhythm (that means 24 hour cycles). Sleep is a circadian rhythm that is guided by light and dark. Sleep is broken down into 2 types: non-REM (stages 1-4) and REM (rapid eye movement). Each phase lasts 90-110 minutes and recycles throughout the night. Each period of sleep has its own physiologic, neurologic and psychological features. The stages are as follows:

Stage 1: Light sleep, when the muscles begin to relax.

Stage 2: Brain activity slows, eye movements occur, heart rate and breathing are regular.

Stage 3: Brain waves become very slow with occasional short rapid brain waves.  
The body is deeply relaxed and it is hard to wake a person in this stage.

Stage 4: All brain waves are slow. This is the deep sleep when people sleep walk.  
It is not dangerous to wake a sleep-walker, just really difficult.

REM: This is the dreaming stage of sleep. Muscles stiffen and relax, heart rate, respirations and eye movement increase. Uninterrupted REM sleep is necessary to integrate learned material and to wake up feeling rested.

## **How much sleep do I need?**

Researchers have found that humans need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep for optimal functioning. Sleep needs change with age and everyone has unique requirements. The benefits of a good nights sleep are greater alertness, better memory, better problem solving and better health. In other words, you are better off getting good nights sleep than cramming for a test.

## **I'm tired all the time.....**

Excessive sleepiness is usually caused by insomnia but can be caused by alcohol use, shift work, over the counter and prescription medications, herbs and supplements. If you have fatigue that is persistent, even with good sleep, you should be seen by your health care provider to make sure there is not an underlying health problem.

## **What is causing me to have problems sleeping?**

Sleep problems can be divided into two categories: *poor sleep hygiene* and *sleep disorders*. Forty-seven percent of people who report having insomnia also report stress and anxiety (US Dept. of Health and Human Services). The first steps in addressing insomnia are decreasing stress and practicing good sleep hygiene. I will outline the steps of good sleep hygiene, and we have many handouts and articles at the Student Health and Psychological Services related to stress reduction, decreasing anxiety and sleep. Sleep disorders such as: sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome (RLS) and circadian rhythm dysfunction require evaluation by your health care provider. Evaluation may include a sleep diary, medical and psychological history, physical exam, laboratory tests and formal sleep studies (performed at independent sleep clinics).

### **Ten Tips for a Good Night's Sleep**

1. Keep a regular schedule. The variation of your bed time should not be more than 1 hour from day to day. Get up around the same time – this means week-ends too!
2. Do not consume alcohol, caffeine or nicotine within 4-6 hours of your bedtime. You may need to eliminate caffeine after lunch.
3. Exercise most days but not within 4 hours of your bedtime.
4. Develop sleep rituals – do the same thing every night to teach your brain and body that it is time to go to sleep. Journaling, reading, taking a bath, yoga, meditation, a cup of herbal tea are some of the rituals that people use.
5. Make your sleep area a peaceful oasis – cool, dark, tidy and quiet. Don't watch TV, play games or use your computer in bed. Put on socks if your feet tend to get cold. Have a good supportive bed with comfortable pillows and sheets. Lavender scent can be calming.
6. Unwind early in the evening. Make a list of all of your worries and stresses and then set it aside for the night.

7. If you can't fall asleep in 30 minutes, get up and do some quiet activity – reading or journaling.
8. If you need a nap, take it before mid-afternoon.
9. Move your alarm clock away from the bed so that you don't watch it during the night and the light does not disturb you.
10. Eat a healthy, well balanced diet.

**Web-sites:**

National Sleep Foundation; <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/about.html>

UpToDate: [www.uptodate.com/patients](http://www.uptodate.com/patients)

American Academy of Sleep Medicine: <http://sleepeducation.com>

**What can Student Health and Psychological Services (SHPS) do for me?**

If these measures do not improve your sleep make an appointment at the SHPS for more help! We have nurse practitioners, physicians and counselors trained to help you with your sleep problems. Sweet dreams.....