

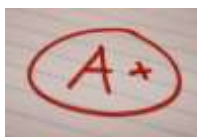


Don't Take Sleep for Granted

I think we can all agree that without good sleep we function at less than 100%. Sleep is important for our physical and mental health. Like food and water, sleep is essential to our wellbeing. Unfortunately many college students are not getting good sleep. Researchers have found that only 11% of students meet the criteria for adequate, good quality sleep and 30% meet the criteria for severe sleep difficulties (Brown, Buboltz, Soper, 2006). The consequences of deficient sleep include poor attention and academic performance as well as an increase in risk-taking behavior, depression, impaired social relationships, and poorer health (Galutney, 2010).

Short changing your sleep can be catastrophic on learning. Research suggests that REM sleep (a stage of sleep) which generally occurs in the last two hours of a full night of sleep is critical for memory and learning (Bublotz, Soper, Brown, & Jenkins, 2002). A lack of sleep can also cause a person to overestimate their ability to function. A person loses insight and judgement and may not even be aware of the deficits caused by a lack of sleep (Pilcher, & Walters, 1997). In a study done by Pilcher and Walters, two groups of students were asked to perform cognitive tasks, one group was sleep deprived and the other group had 8 hours of sleep, the group that was not sleep deprived performed better. The most interesting finding was that the sleep deprived group rated their performance to be significantly higher than the non-sleep deprived group. Not only did the sleep deprived students not recognize their diminished capacity – they overestimated their performance on the cognitive tasks of inference, recognition of assumptions, and deduction on the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Test.

Benefits of Sleep – Listed below are some of the benefits of making sure you get adequate sleep.

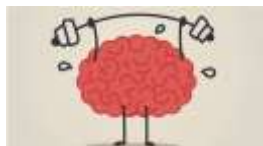


Higher GPA - students who report disordered sleep are more likely to have a lower GPA and are at higher risk of academic failure (Galutney, 2010).



Better Memory/ Better Test Scores – The more minutes you spend sleeping – the more memory capacity you have. Cramming for a test is not the best way to study. The best way to study is over a period time (not beginning the night before the test) and getting a

good night sleep. Minutes of sleep has been positively correlated with memory capacity. In a test on memory capacity of college students it was observed to be better when they spent more than 6 hours and 42 minutes asleep on the test date and more than 6 hours and 37 minutes asleep per day on average during the week before the test date (Chan et al., 2019). Research suggests that REM sleep, the sleep you get in the last two hours, appears to be the most important for memory consolidation. If you are getting less than 8 hours of sleep, you are depriving yourself of this benefit (Brown, Walter, Buboltz, Soper, 2006)



Better Mental Health – Students who report healthy sleep habits also report less stress, better mood and overall wellness as compared to students that are sleep deprived (Orzech, Salafsky, Hamilton, 2011)



Better Physical Health – The restoration of bone, skin and other tissues takes place during sleep. People who get good quality sleep experience decreased pain, lowered risk of injury, increased mood, and better weight control (Benn, Lanier, 2016). Another physical benefit is that people who get good sleep are better at fighting off illness. Getting less than 6 hours of sleep a night can cause a reduction in T cells which are important for immunity. (Brown, Buboltz, Soper, 2006)

How to Get Better Sleep (Sleep Hygiene) – there are many suggestions for getting better sleep. You may benefit from trying just one, you may need to try several until you find what works for you.



Get Into a Routine – it is important to get into a rhythm of going to bed at the same time and waking up at the same time every day of the week. Even a two hour shift can be harmful to the amount and quality of sleep you get. Research has found that students who sleep later on the weekends experience a disruption in their sleep wake cycle and are prone to develop problems in concentration, irritability and depression (Bulbotz, Brown, Soper, 2001). Many students attempt to increase sleep time on the

weekends to make up for their sleep deficit during the week. This can actually make the problem worse (Galutney, 2010). This behavior can further disrupt the sleep/wake cycle and lead to a greater sleep deficit. Students with a consistent schedule of week and weekend wake and sleep times experience better quality sleep and academic performance (Brown, Buboltz, Soper 2006.) It is a false belief that you can sleep in on

the weekend and make up for lost sleep during the week. You may not be able to follow a rigid sleep wake cycle but you should do your best to keep it as consistent as possible.



Avoid Screen Time and Bright Blue Light after 6 PM –

especially an hour before you go to bed. This will signal your brain that it is time to get ready for sleep and dial it down. (Shinn, 2020). It should be no surprise that research has found that students who text, play video games, and use electronics at bedtime and through the night are at increased risk for sleep deprivation (Whipps, Byra, Gerow, Guesman, 2018). It is suggested that you turn off electronics and if you can't remove your cell phone from the bedroom it could be helpful to silence it. Your brain has to naturally wind down and bright light says to your brain that it is day time and time to work, stay awake! It is not easy for your brain to quickly shift from wake to sleep. If avoiding electronics is impossible, set your device to night mode, the screen will be less bright. (Barber & Cucalon, 2017)



Prepare for Sleep –

Just like you would prepare for your day by getting up, eating breakfast and getting dressed, you need to prepare for sleep. Develop a routine that will signal your brain that it is almost time for sleep. A bedtime ritual might be: shut off electronics, take a shower, get into comfortable night clothes, call and “talk” to a friend, draw, do a meditation, journal... Find out what works for you. (Barber & Cucalon, 2017). Lastly, lie down in your bed and don't use your phone, watch TV or other waking activities. You want your brain and body to associate the bed with sleep not wakefulness. If after about 20 minutes you haven't fallen asleep, get up and do something calming like reading a book, drawing, or journaling. You could also practice a mindfulness meditation when you get into bed and see if that helps to relax you and cause you to fall asleep. Avoid computer, TV, and phone screens, or anything else that's stimulating and could lead to becoming more awake.



Avoid napping -

Napping during the day will make sleep more difficult at night. Naps that are over an hour long, or those that are later in the day, are especially harmful to sleep hygiene.



Exercise – A regular exercise routine has shown to decrease the amount of time it takes for a person to get to sleep and exercise can increase the time spent in stage 3 and stage 4 sleep which are the stages of deep sleep. Vigorous exercise such as running or stationary cycling are more beneficial than a less cardiovascular exercise such as weight lifting. The exercise should not be done within 3 hours of bedtime (Bublitz, Soper, Brown, & Jenkins, 2002).



Nutrition –Limit caffeine consumption, and eliminate energy drinks. Studies show that there is a significant relationship between energy drink consumption and poor quality sleep. You also need to feed your brain and help it wake-up and get ready for the day. Don't skip breakfast. Include protein such as eggs, yogurt, meat or milk. Protein helps keep your brain awake by stimulating the production of dopamine which is a “wakefulness” neurotransmitter (Shinn, 2020). Try not to eat two hours before bed time. Give your digestive system a chance to wind down in preparation of a good night's sleep. You should also avoid alcohol. Alcohol tends to interfere with the quality of your sleep – you may get 8 hours of sleep after consuming alcohol but REM sleep is diminished (Van Reen, & Carskadon, 2006). Nicotine also interferes with sleep and should be avoided.



Aromatherapy – Lavender oil has been proven to help with sleep hygiene (Oliff, 2016). In a study done on college students it was discovered that wearing a patch with lavender oil at bedtime for 5 days can improve sleep and the effects were still present two weeks after the patch was discontinued. Something to try if you are experiencing mild disturbances in sleep (but not if you are allergic to lavender of course).



Practice Mindfulness – College students report that one of the top reasons they don't get good sleep is because they are stressed. Many studies support the use of Mindfulness exercises to help improve sleep and manage stress more effectively (Caldwell, Harrison, Adams, Quin, & Greeson, 2010). Mindfulness can be learned through various meditation apps such as Smiling Mind, Insight Timer, and Calm. Mindfulness can also be learned though movement exercises such as Pilates and Yoga. Check out some free mindfulness apps, a yoga video on You-tube or check out the Herkimer College Activities Calendar for a yoga or meditation class. You can also make an appointment with one of the Herkimer College Counselors for an introduction to mindfulness.



The Environment - a comfortable environment is important. You should have an area that is quiet, comfortable, and dark. If your environment is less than ideal try using an eye mask, ear plugs, fans or other white noise.

Taking a behavioral approach and practicing good sleep hygiene has been found to improve sleep patterns and habits of most people (Bublotz, Soper, Brown & Jenkins 2002). Medications to aid sleep are meant to be short term, they can be habit forming and can contribute to day time sleepiness (Harvard Health Letter, 2018). Some individuals have a sleep disorder such as sleep apnea that will not improve by practicing better sleep hygiene. If you feel that the amount or quality of your sleep is compromised you should consult with your primary care physician.

If you would like to discuss sleep hygiene with a counselor call or visit the counseling center and make an appointment. We are located in CC 302, our phone # is 315 574-4034.

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