

WHY IS SLEEP IMPORTANT?

If you don't get adequate sleep, you'll notice you feel rundown and tired, making it hard to concentrate in class and while studying. You may even be too tired to carry out routine activities. However, you probably don't notice the changes in your mood that affect not only you, but also those around you. Lack of sleep causes irritability, impatience, and depression; it undermines creativity and efficiency. Fatigue will prevent you from peak academic performance by hindering memorization, concentration, and motivation. Even if you can still muster the energy to play sports, your reaction time will be slowed and coordination affected.

It's not just the length of time you're in bed that counts, but the quality of sleep you get while lying there. Frequent interruptions of sleep can undermine daytime energy as much as no sleep at all. You can improve the quality of your sleep by establishing regular sleeping patterns, always going to bed and getting up around the same time everyday.

Changing your schedule on the weekends so you go to bed and wake up extremely late disrupts your body's clock, and once your biological rhythms are disturbed, you are more likely to feel stress, resulting in irritability, exhaustion, and weakened immune response.

If you continually suffer from serious sleep deprivation, the results can be severe. Long-term effects of sleep deficiency are diabetes (disrupted insulin production), weakened immune system (altered white blood cell production), obesity (decreased production of leptin, the chemical that makes you feel full), and cognitive problems (inability to store and maintain long-term memories).

How much sleep do I need?

Once you reach your late teens, your sleep needs are equivalent to those of an adult – about 8 or 9 hours. However, individual sleep needs vary from 6 to 10 hours, so make sure you know how much sleep you need to function efficiently. Uninterrupted sleep is important to experience periods of rapid eye movement (REM), which are necessary for learning, problem solving, and storing memories.

How can I get a good night's sleep?

- **Don't go to bed hungry or full.** Hunger and indigestion hinder sleep.
- **Get regular exercise** (3-4 times per week), but not right before you plan to go to sleep – mid-afternoon is best.
- **Use your bed only for sleep and sex** (if it's right for you). Avoid using it to study, eat, chat with friends, etc.
- **Create the right environment.** Make sure your room is dark and quiet, and the right temperature. Most experts agree cooler temperatures work best. If you're bothered by noise, wear earplugs or use a fan to create white noise.
- **Don't nap.** But if you have to, do it before 3 pm and for less than an hour.

- **Reduce stress.** If you're worried about getting your work done, make a to-do list for the next day to assure yourself you have enough time to accomplish what needs to get done. Once the chores that cause you stress are down on paper, your mind is free to relax and think more pleasant thoughts.
- **Eat (lightly) to induce sleep.** Although you shouldn't eat too much right before sleep, certain foods promote sleep. Such foods include the amino acid L-tryptophan, found in milk, turkey, and tuna; and carbohydrates, such as bread and cereal. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and large amounts of sugar.
- **Take warm shower or bath.**
- **Read a book,** or some other calm activity that relaxes you. Creating a relaxing ritual can help your body slow down in preparation for sleep.
- **Set your body's clock.** Go to sleep and get up around the same time every day to set your body's rhythm.
- **Practice relaxation techniques before bedtime.** Deep breathing and visualization techniques can help you relax and facilitate sleep.
- **Avoid sleep-disturbing substances like alcohol and caffeine.** Alcohol creates the illusions of good sleep but the architecture of sleep is affected adversely. Sleep is fragmented with deep sleep initially and a rebound of REM sleep later. Caffeine is a stimulant and reaches its peak effect in the first hour but with a half-life elimination of 3-7 hours. Caffeine is a potent sleep inhibitor and it increases sleep latency, night waking, decreases total sleep time, decreases slow-wave sleep, impairs overall sleep quality.

**If you would like to talk about any of these issues, call the
Counseling Center at (336) 316-2163.**
