

Back to School, Back to Sleep?

HEALTH TIP #4 • SEPTEMBER 17, 2006



How many nights a week do you get the 7-8 hours of nightly sleep that doctors recommend for the average adult? For many of us students, 7 or 8 hours might be difficult to manage with the challenges of a busy student lifestyle. Most often, we find ourselves studying late into the night during the week as we prepare for class, and on weekends we probably will also be awake late into the night roaming the streets of Berkeley or San Francisco, or maybe getting our groove on in the Great Hall, if it happens to be an I-House dance weekend. The truth is, many students do not make it a priority to get 7 or 8 hours of sleep a night, even though sleep is one of the most important factors that affects our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. A good night's sleep is often the best way to help you cope with stress, solve problems, or recover from illness.

The Dangerous Accumulation of Sleep Debt:

Many doctors theorize that accumulated lost sleep is like a monetary debt: It must be paid back! As your debt grows, your energy, mood, and cognition will be compromised. Each waking hour accrues one half-hour of sleep debt, and unless that debt is slept off each night, it will continue to grow until the body collapses and forces itself to sleep. Sleep debt not slept off each night causes sleepiness at various irregular points of the day and debt cannot be paid back if sleep deprivation persists.

Fan of All-Nighters?

Even after an all nighter (or maybe two in a row), you may find yourself "magically" wide awake at 9:30 A.M. the next morning, but don't doubt that those hours of lost sleep won't come to haunt you later in the day or during the consecutive days that follow. All-nighters are a definite stress upon the mind and body that may raise your susceptibility to illness, disease, emotional imbalance.

Want to Live to a 100? According to research by *Time* magazine*, an average of eight hours of nightly sleep is the number-one lifestyle habit correlated with longevity.

Insomnia is a sleep disorder characterized by difficulty falling and/or staying asleep. Insomnia can be its own medical problem (primary insomnia) or it can be caused by a separate issue (secondary insomnia) such as depression or side effects from medication. Insomnia may be an acute (short-term) problem, meaning it lasts less than 1 month, or it can be chronic, lasting 1 month or longer.

Symptom of Acute Insomnia-

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking up often during the night and having trouble going back to sleep
- Waking up too early in the morning
- Feeling tired upon waking
- Sleepiness during the day
- Irritability and problems with concentration or memory

Causes of Acute Insomnia-

- Stress
- Illness
- Emotional or physical discomfort (bad mattress)
- Environmental factors like noise, light, or extreme temperatures that interfere with sleep
- Some medications (like those used to treat colds, allergies, depression, high blood pressure and asthma).
- Interferences in normal sleep schedule (e.g. jet lag, working a night shift, pulling an all-nighter)

Causes of **chronic insomnia** can include: depression and/or anxiety, chronic stress, pain or discomfort at night. If a sleep disorder like insomnia is interfering with your daily life, it is advisable to see a doctor or a sleep specialist.

TIPS TO SLEEPING WELL

1. Sleep only when sleepy- This reduces time awake in bed. If you can't fall asleep within 20 min, get up and do something boring until you feel sleepy.
3. Limit naps during the day to less than an hour so as not to interrupt your body's sleep routine.
4. Refrain from exercising 4 hours before going to bed. Exercising in the morning or early afternoon will not interfere with your sleep.
5. Try to get up and go to bed at the same time every day. A regular sleep schedule will make you feel better.
6. Try to only use your bed for sleeping. Refrain from doing work or reading in your bed so that your body knows the bed is for sleeping. Sex is the only exception.
7. Stay away from using caffeine, nicotine and alcohol 4-6 hours before going to sleep. They cause fragmentation in your sleep.
8. Take a hot shower or bath before going to bed. The hot water will raise your body temperature, but the drop afterwards will induce sleepiness.

Resources You Can Use:

Rexall (Telegraph Ave)
Walgreen's Pharmacy (Shattuck & Alton): 849-4286
Whole Foods (Telegraph) for natural remedies.

This Health Tip based on:

1. <http://www.webmd.com/content/article/105/107660.htm>

- *2. "Why We Sleep", Gorman, C., *Time*, Dec. 20, 2004
3. "Sleep debt and clock dependent alerting", From Dement, W. and Vaughn, C., *The Promise of Sleep*
4. "The Buzz on Caffeine", Kluger, J., *Time*, Dec. 20, 2004

Visit the Tang Center for information on sleep.

Appointments (M-F 8-4:45): 642-2000
Advice Nurse (M-F 8-4:30): 643-7197
After-Hours Assistance: 643-7197
Self-Care Resource Center (M-F 11-4): 642-7202
www.uhs.berkeley.edu

Reminder: All students can use Tang even if they waived out of Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP).

Your International House Health Worker is:

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Health Tip Archive:
<http://ihouse.berkeley.edu/1/residents/healthtips.html>