

## The university student's guide to

# SLEEP

### Getting a good night's sleep: Why bother?

Canadians sleep 1 hour less than 25 years ago, and on any given day, millions of Canadians are deprived of sleep. As society increases in complexity, more demands are placed on individuals and families. As a result, people feel that there are not enough hours in the day to do what needs to be done. The amount of hours in the day can't be increased. Therefore, to meet the demands on their time, people have to cut things out of their schedule. Unfortunately, rather than cutting out events or activities, or not undertaking new responsibilities, many people choose to cut out sleep.


Experts warn that sleep deprivation is a major health problem in today's society. Some sleep researchers point out that getting enough good sleep is as important to health as exercising and eating a low-fat diet. Research is revealing that lack of quality sleep affects health in many ways, including a decrease in memory and a decrease in the brain's ability to function at optimal levels. This means that for students, cutting out sleep could translate into a decrease in academic performance.

### Are you getting enough sleep?

Sleep needs vary from person to person and from situation to situation. In general, most people need from 6 to 8 hours of quality, uninterrupted sleep each night. One good way to identify how much sleep you need is to find a few days where you can sleep as long as you wish, and do exactly that...sleep. Don't set the alarm. Make sure that you have not deprived yourself of sleep for the week before. Note how long you sleep and this will closely approximate the amount of sleep that is best for you.

Most people can tell when they haven't had enough sleep. For some, though, it is less clear. Below are a few questions that can help you determine if you are not getting enough sleep. Answer yes or no to the following questions:

1. Do you usually need an alarm clock to wake up in the morning?
2. Do you often feel drowsy in warm rooms or during "boring" meetings, classes or presentations?
3. Do you often need a nap to get through the day?
4. Do you fall asleep almost as soon as your head hits the pillow at night?
5. Do you often fall asleep watching television?
6. Do you fall asleep after large meals or after drinking alcohol?
7. Do you sleep extra on weekends?
8. Do you have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning?

	<b>IN THE LENDING LIBRARY</b>
	No More Sleepless Nights
	Power Sleep
	50 Ways to Sleep Better

If you answered yes to a few of these questions, you are possibly sleep deprived. If you answered yes to most of the questions, you are probably sleep deprived.

Fortunately, there is one sure way to overcome lack of sleep...get more sleep. One way to make more time for sleep is to figure out what is keeping you out of your cosy bed. Is it because of poor time management skills? Is it because of taking on too many responsibilities? Once you have identified the reason, brainstorm what you can do to change it. For example, build your time management skills or learn to prioritize. Remove or decrease the time spent in activities or responsibilities that are not important. By getting more sleep you will probably be more alert and motivated to enjoy the things that ARE important.

### Sleep problems

Sleep problems may include trouble falling asleep, trouble, staying asleep, or waking up too early and being unable to fall back asleep. Insomnia—not getting enough restful sleep—can be transient, meaning that it lasts anywhere from a few nights to 2 or 3 weeks. It can also be chronic, where a person has poor sleep on most nights for months or even years. Transient insomnia is often the result of stress, which can happen during exams, when a person is experiencing job troubles or relationship problems, or from any situation that seems overwhelming. Learning to manage stress and using relaxation exercises can help treat insomnia that is linked to stress.

Both transient and chronic insomnia can be a result of: physical problems such as sleep apnea, where a person stops breathing for a short period of time at night; mental health problems such as depression, or; the use of medications. If you suspect that a physical problem, a mental health problem, or medications are interfering with your sleep, you should consult a health care professional.

	<b>ON THE NET</b>
	<a href="http://www.sleepnet.com">www.sleepnet.com</a>

## Tips for getting adequate quality sleep

There are several strategies that a person can use to get a better night's sleep. They include:

- **Establish a routine.** When you change the timing of your sleep, you affect your circadian rhythm: the internal "clock" that guides sleep patterns. Research demonstrates that going to bed late upsets your circadian rhythm, but the time you wake up has an even greater impact on your sleep cycle. More than any other strategy, having a regular schedule will improve the quality of your sleep. As much as possible, go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning, even on weekends.
- **Manage your stress.** Stress and sleep problems are strongly linked. Evaluate your experience of stress and learn and use effective stress-management strategies. For more information, check out the "Stress Management" chapter of this booklet.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Alcohol is a depressant. It can help people fall asleep by slowing down body processes. As the alcohol is eliminated from the body there is a rebound stimulant effect, which can result in night-time waking, vivid dreams or fitful sleep.
- **Avoid heavy meals at night.** These can contribute to difficulty falling asleep. On the other hand, having a light snack (e.g. cereal, cheese and crackers) can help. Studies reveal that high carbohydrate meals late in the day can induce sleepiness.
- **Avoid caffeine late in the day.** Caffeine can interfere with your ability to fall asleep and get deep sleep, the type that boosts the immune system and allows you to feel refreshed. The average half-life of caffeine is 5 hours, which means that in 5 hours, the level of caffeine in the blood is decreased *by half*. This means that significant levels of caffeine can remain in your blood far into the night, when it can interfere with your ability to have quality sleep. Eliminate caffeine later in the day. You can set a cut-off time of 3 p.m., or even better...noon.
- **Don't nap.** If you nap during the day you may not be sufficiently tired to fall asleep at night. Contain all your sleeping time to one period. However, as people age, night-time sleep decreases in quality. Therefore, napping may be beneficial for the elderly.
- **Get regular exercise.** Exercise challenges the body and promotes restorative sleep. Research shows that a regular exercise regime helps people fall asleep faster and stay asleep. Exercise stimulates the body, so don't do it late at night or it may negatively affect sleep.
- **Use the bed only for sex, sleep, or when you are sick.** Watching television or eating in bed can alter how a person perceives his or her bed and possibly make it difficult to fall asleep.
- **Take a warm bath.** Falling asleep is connected to a drop in body temperature. Your body temperature drops when you get out of the bath and this helps you fall asleep.
- **Don't worry about not getting much sleep.** One study found that those who worry about their difficulty sleeping start a cycle of negative thoughts that contributes to more problems sleeping.
- **Make your bedroom sleep friendly.** The best conditions for sleep are a cool (not too hot or cold), quiet environment. The bed should be comfortable, firm and the right size. Exposure to light during sleep decreases the secretion of melatonin, a hormone that stimulates sleepiness. Even brief exposure to bright light can disturb the quality of sleep. Make sure your room is dark, with curtains that block out light.
- **Turn your alarm clock to the wall.** Some people keep checking the clock to follow their sleep (or lack of sleep) progress. As the hours pass, this can contribute to anxiety from not sleeping. Make it a habit to avoid looking at the time.
- **Avoid stimulating activities in the evening.** These include exercise, watching a scary movie or reading a really good book. Instead, do something relaxing before bedtime.
- **Don't drink too much liquid in the evening.** This can contribute to night-time awakenings to go to the bathroom.
- **Plan worry time.** If you are a person who worries about things at bedtime, put some worry time aside in the early evening to get things off your mind. Have a pen and paper available to write down all your worries and what you will do about them. Don't spend too much time doing this or you may get yourself worked up. Fifteen minutes should be sufficient. Also, put a pad and pen next to your bed to write down concerns that stop you from falling asleep when you are in bed. As you put things down on paper, tell yourself that you don't need to think about them anymore since they are already noted and it will do no good to continue worrying.
- **Learn to relax.** Relaxation techniques, such as progressive relaxation and meditation, can help you fall asleep. Consult the "Stress Management" chapter for more information.
- **Try to stay awake.** One study found that trying to stay awake as long as possible can have the opposite effect and help people fall asleep.
- **Don't try too hard.** If you find that you can't sleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing like listening to music or reading something light. After 20 minutes or so, go back to bed. Some people find that doing the most boring thing they can think of can put them in the mood for sleep.
- **Avoid sleeping pills.** Although sleeping pills can be beneficial in some situations, their regular use is discouraged. Taking medications to fall asleep does not get to the heart of the problem. Rebound insomnia can occur when a person stops taking sleeping pills. Also, some sleeping pills disturb REM sleep, which is the part of the sleep cycle that is important for feeling refreshed, rested and rejuvenated in the morning.

Sleep problems affect almost everyone at some point in their life. If you have problems sleeping for a few days, don't worry. Most people can get by on a few hours sleep for a short period of time. But if you have had disturbed sleep for a month or more, and it is affecting your daily functioning, then you should consult a physician.

### THE MANY BENEFITS OF SLEEP

There are many benefits to be gained from working to improve the quality of your sleep. These include:

- A stronger immune system;
- Improved concentration, problem-solving, and creativity, leading to better performance;
- Improved relationships, as lack of sleep can cause irritability;
- Improved external appearance, as the body regenerates skin, blood, and muscles during sleep;
- Lower risk of many illnesses, including depression, diabetes, heart problems, weight gain and obesity, accidents...