

SLEEPING THROUGH COLLEGE

You rush out of orgo lab, tearing your gloves off as you go because your friends left you a message: We are going to Rocky Run NOW. After a quick dinner, you go back to your room and study for that Latin test tomorrow, and then rush off to a Culturefest exec meeting. After that, you have a study date with that hot football player to finish up your homework together. When that's done, you head home, still trying to remember the declensions for the Latin test. You get in bed with your Biology book and fall asleep before finishing the first page, let alone the entire reading for lecture tomorrow. It's 2:30 am.

The Problem:

College students, especially students at an academically challenging and competitive school, do not get enough sleep. Many can relate to the above scenario. Sleep is considered unnecessary, even a luxury, by some. Students think they can catch up on sleep on the weekends, but then that conflicts with the desire to have a semi-normal social life or the need to play catch up on work still undone. However, the problem is not always the quantity of sleep, but the quality as well. Dorm life makes it difficult to get a peaceful, quiet night's rest and extended napping, though relaxing at the time, will disrupt the natural circadian rhythm in your bodyⁱ.

The Solution:

It is not as simple as going to bed earlier. For many students at Hopkins, late in the evening is considered valuable study time; however this may have adverse affects on the learning process.

New research shows that the sleep cycle of slow-wave sleep and rapid eye movement (REM) in fact significantly fortifies the memory and learning process^{ii,iii}.

So what is the answer? Below are a few suggestions to help you get better sleep:

- Manage your time wisely; make time for resting and realize that getting a good night's sleep will make you more alert and productive.
- Limit the amount of caffeine you have after dinner. Even though you may be tired late at night, caffeine will affect the quality of sleep you get.
- Keep a schedule and stick to it. Just as you set aside time for eating, studying, or "the real world," schedule time for sleeping.
- Exercise benefits your overall life; it will boost your attentiveness during the day and enhance your quality of sleep at night.
- Complete projects and assignments an hour before you go to bed. This will give your brain time to wind down and you will sleep better and feel more rested.
- Drink alcohol wisely. If you have a huge project due the next week, take it easy on the Jager. Alcohol consumption, though it might cause you to pass out, will not cause you to have a restful night's sleep; you will wake up still tired and groggy.
- Most experts agree that a good night's sleep is somewhere between six and nine *continuous* hours of sleep; in other words, if you took a three hour nap at 2pm and then got four hours of sleep that night, it doesn't add up to a good night's sleep.
- College is swarming with germs. Sleep is your body's natural way to refresh itself and combat illness.

Don't know if you're getting enough sleep?



Take this quiz^{iv}...if you answer Yes to any of the questions, you need to reconsider your sleeping habits!

1. Do you have difficulty falling asleep most nights?
2. Have you been told that you snore loudly?
3. Has anyone noticed an interruption in your breathing while you sleep?
4. Has anyone told you that you are restless (e.g., move your legs or kick) while you sleep?
5. Do you wake up with pain or stiffness in your legs?
6. Do you feel depressed during the day (e.g., feelings of sadness)?
7. Do you feel under pressure or stressed often?
8. Do you find yourself needing to take one or more naps during the day?
9. Do you feel sleepy or fatigued during the day?
10. Do you wake up during the night and have trouble getting back to sleep?
11. Do you wake up too early and have trouble getting back to sleep?
12. Have you ever fallen asleep while driving or operating heavy machinery?
13. Does going to the library automatically make you feel tired (see picture)?

Helpful Links:

National Sleep Foundation: www.sleepfoundation.org

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: "Understanding Sleep"
http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics/understanding_sleep.htm

Sleep Research Society: <http://www.sleepresearchsociety.org>

ⁱ Pauk, Walter. *How to Study in College*. 7th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001) 66.

ⁱⁱ Bower, Bruce. "Sleeper Effects: Slumber may fortify memory, stir insight." *Science News This Week* January 4 2004: 53-54.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bower, Bruce. "Restoring Recall: Memories may form and reform, with sleep." *Science News This Week* October 11 2003: 228.

^{iv} "Sleep Quiz." Medbroadcast.com. 15 Jul 2004 http://www.medbroadcast.com/channel_section_details.asp?channel_id=1044&relation_id=609&top_rec=1.