

10.3 Sleep

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain why students need adequate sleep to succeed in college.
2. Determine how much sleep you need.
3. Change your habits and routines in ways to ensure you get the sleep you need.

Like good nutrition and exercise, adequate sleep is crucial for wellness and success. Sleep is particularly important for students because there seem to be so many time pressures—to attend class, study, maintain a social life, and perhaps work—that most college students have difficulty getting enough. Yet sleep is critical for concentrating well. First, use the Sleep Self-Assessment to consider your current habits and attitudes.

SLEEP SELF-ASSESSMENT

Check the appropriate boxes.

	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
1. I usually get enough sleep.			
2. I feel drowsy or unfocused during the day.			
3. I take a nap when I need more sleep.			
4. I have fallen asleep in class or had trouble staying awake.			
5. I have fallen asleep while studying.			
6. I have pulled an “all-nighter” when studying for a test or writing a class paper.			

Write your answers.

7. How many hours of sleep do you usually get on weeknights?

8. How many hours of sleep do you usually get on weekends?

9. How would you rank the importance of sleep in relation to studying, working, spending time with friends, and other activities?

10. How many hours of sleep do you think you ideally need?

11. Generally, do you believe you are getting as much sleep as you think you need?

The Importance of a Good Night's Sleep

You may not realize the benefits of sleep, or the problems associated with being sleep deprived, because most likely you've had the same sleep habits for a long time. Or maybe you know you're getting less sleep now, but with all the changes in your life, how can you tell if some of your stress or problems studying are related to not enough sleep?

On the positive side, a healthy amount of sleep has the following benefits:

- Improves your mood during the day
- Improves your memory and learning abilities
- Gives you more energy
- Strengthens your immune system
- Promotes wellness of body, mind, and spirit

In contrast, not getting enough sleep over time can lead to a wide range of health issues and student problems. **Sleep deprivation** can have the following consequences:

- Affects mental health and contributes to **stress** and feelings of anxiety, depression, and general unhappiness
- Causes sleepiness, difficulty paying attention in class, and ineffective studying
- Weakens the immune system, making it more likely to catch colds and other infections
- Increases the risk of accidents (such as while driving)
- Contributes to weight gain

How Much Sleep Is Enough?

College students are the most sleep-deprived population group in the country. With so much to do, who has time for sleep?

Most people need seven to nine hours of sleep a night, and the average is around eight. Some say they need much less than that, but often their behavior during the day shows they are actually sleep deprived. Some genuinely need only about six hours a night. New research indicates there may be a "sleep gene" that determines how much sleep a person needs. So how much sleep do *you* actually need?

There is no simple answer, in part because the quality of sleep is just as important as the number of hours a person sleeps. Sleeping fitfully for nine hours and waking during the

night is usually worse than seven or eight hours of good sleep, so you can't simply count the hours. Do you usually feel rested and alert all day long? Do you rise from bed easily in the morning without struggling with the alarm clock? Do you have no trouble paying attention to your instructors and never feel sleepy in a lecture class? Are you not continually driven to drink more coffee or caffeine-heavy "power drinks" to stay attentive? Are you able to get through work without feeling exhausted? If you answered yes to all of these, you likely are in that 10 percent to 15 percent of college students who consistently get enough sleep.

How to Get More and Better Sleep

You have to allow yourself enough time for a good night's sleep. Using the time management strategies discussed in [Chapter 2 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track"](#), schedule at least eight hours for sleeping every night. If you still don't feel alert and energetic during the day, try increasing this to nine hours. Keep a sleep journal, and within a couple weeks you'll know how much sleep you need and will be on the road to making new habits to ensure you get it.

Myths about Sleep

- **Having a drink or two helps me get to sleep better.** *False:* Although you may seem to fall asleep more quickly, alcohol makes sleep less restful, and you're more likely to awake in the night.
- **Exercise before bedtime is good for sleeping.** *False:* Exercise wakes up your body, and it may be some time before you unwind and relax. Exercise earlier in the day, however, is beneficial for sleep.
- **It helps to fall asleep after watching television or surfing the Web in bed.** *False:* Rather than helping you unwind, these activities can engage your mind and make it more difficult to get to sleep.

Tips for Success: Sleep

- Avoid **nicotine**, which can keep you awake—yet another reason to stop smoking.
- Avoid **caffeine** for six to eight hours before bed. Caffeine remains in the body for three to five hours on the average, much longer for some people. Remember that many soft drinks contain caffeine.
- Don't eat in the two to three hours before bed. Avoid alcohol before bedtime.
- Don't nap during the day. Napping is the least productive form of rest and often makes you less alert. It may also prevent you from getting a good night's sleep.
- Exercise earlier in the day (at least several hours before bedtime).
- Try to get to bed and wake about the same time every day—your body likes a routine.
- Make sure the environment is conducive to sleep: dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.
- Use your bed only for sleeping, not for studying, watching television, or other activities. Going to bed will become associated with going to sleep.
- Establish a presleep winding-down routine, such as taking a hot bath, listening to soothing music, or reading (not a textbook). Try one of the relaxation techniques described in [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#), [Section 10.5 "Stress"](#).

If you can't fall asleep after ten to fifteen minutes in bed, it's better to get up and do something else rather than lie there fitfully for hours. Do something you find restful (or boring). Read, or listen to a recorded book. Go back to bed when you're sleepy.

If you frequently cannot get to sleep or are often awake for a long time during the night, you may be suffering from **insomnia**, a medical condition. Resist the temptation to try over-the-counter sleep aids. If you have tried the tips listed here and still cannot sleep, talk with your health-care provider or visit the student health clinic. Many remedies are available for those with a true sleep problem.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Getting enough sleep is very important for wellness and success in college. It's easy to determine if you're getting enough sleep.
- Don't fall for popular myths about sleep. It's worthwhile to get enough sleep, which gives you an improved ability to focus and apply yourself more efficiently in your studies and work.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. List at least three things you should *not* do before going to bed in order to get a good night's sleep.

2. Identify one or two things you can do as a regular presleep routine to help you relax and wind down.
