

Get your Head out of Those Books



... and onto your Pillow!

by Katelyn Baker



Sleep, glorious sleep. Everyone in today's society seems to worship their beds like a long-lost lover who remains out of their grasp. Why is it that we seem to treat sleep like a guilty pleasure, something that we do when we are weak and not something that is a fundamental part of

staying healthy? Kids are forced to get up early for school – sometimes classes start as early as 7:10 a.m. – and adults sometimes have to travel hours, by train and/or car to get to work on time at 9:00 a.m. It's no wonder that 56% of adults feel they aren't getting enough sleep. It's even worse for younger people. In college, the demands for exceptional performance in school, a busy social life and potentially a budding career all fight for a person's attention. It's no wonder that a study at Stanford found that 80% of the people were severely sleep deprived.

"Why is this such a big deal?", you ask. Everyone knows how good sleep feels. Everyone knows that your bed is the best hello and the hardest goodbye, but what's the big deal if we aren't getting enough sleep? Actually, a lot. Not only does a lack of sleep lead to an increased risk of obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, heart disease and other physical issues; it also impacts our ability to function in our daily lives. Sleep is when our brains, especially young brains, are growing and developing. A person's brain is not done developing until the age of 25, so up until this point is when it is most critical for us to get the amount of sleep we need. During sleep, our brains are busy healing and our bodies are preparing us

for the following day's tasks. In fact, a lack of sleep can lead to emotional issues such as mood swings, impaired motor skills, a lack of motivation, an inability to solve problems, trouble making decisions, inability to cope with change, an increase in risk-taking behaviors and even an increased likelihood of depression and suicide. With these emotional impairments, it's no surprise that a Harvard Medical study found that sleeping fewer than five hours a night (about half the recommended hours of sleep for young brains) can increase the risk of death from ALL CAUSES by about 15%. In fact, driving while tired is actually just as dangerous, if not more than, driving drunk. Driving tired results in about 100,000 car accidents EACH YEAR, which results in about 1,500 deaths. Most of these accidents are caused by people under the age of 25.

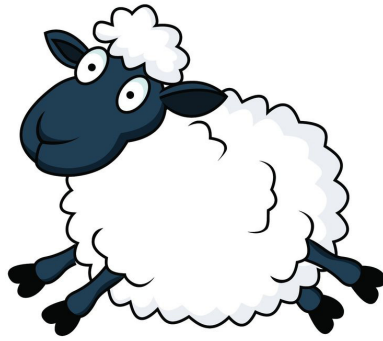
Starting to see the benefits of getting a proper night's sleep now?

I hope so.



So, how much sleep is enough?

Everyone's body is different; therefore, everyone requires a different amount of sleep. Most people need an average of nine hours of sleep, plus or minus one hour. The rule is, if you need an alarm clock to get up each morning, you need more sleep." What do you mean?"; I bet you're asking. "Doesn't everyone use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning?!" Yeah, now you're starting to see the problem.



Now that you know you're most likely incredibly sleep deprived and that this can cause serious issues in all aspects of your life, let me give you some tips to get the sleep that you need.

1. First of all, try and **go to sleep and wake up at the same time** each morning. Yes, this includes weekends. This will help your body regulate when you should be asleep and when you should be awake to match with your busy schedule. So, if you need to get up at 6:00 a.m. every morning for school, try to get to bed by 10:00 p.m. at the latest every night. Stop groaning. It's not that early.
2. Your brain needs at least an hour before you actually fall asleep to begin to get tired. This means that, even if you go to bed at 10:00 p.m., you most likely won't actually fall asleep until about 11 :00 p.m. if you turn the TV off at 10:00 exactly. **Use the hour before bed to relax.** Try not to look at a screen and try reading instead. It doesn't matter what, a magazine, your biology textbook (that will most likely put you to sleep right away), anything with words. Reading helps the brain to relax and will actually make it easier to fall asleep.
3. **Avoid certain foods like coffee and chocolate,** which are stimulants. These will keep you awake and make it harder for you to sleep when you actually get to bed.

4. **Also avoid nicotine and alcohol.** These substances can also make it hard for your brain to turn off when it is time for you to sleep.

5. **Keep your bedroom cool, dark and quiet.** This will help you fall asleep faster and even increase the quality of your sleep.

6. Also, **try not to use your bedroom for much besides sleeping.** If your brain is used to working in your bedroom (for example, doing homework, answering e--mails), then it will be hard for your brain to adjust to sleeping in that same environment.

7. **Exercising regularly will also help to keep your body tired** for when it is time to go to bed. However, try to avoid working out just before bed time, seeing as your body will need time to decompress after a workout session.

8. Try to do something relaxing like **take a hot bath or drink warm milk** (yes, believe it or not, it actually helps) before bed.

Whatever works to get you the sleep your body needs, just do it. Make sure to take care of yourself. Sleeping eight hours a night can give you super powers. Just ask my favorite author, Maggie Stiefvater, who worked full-time all throughout college and still managed to get eight hours of sleep each night.



For more information:

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org>

<http://www.sleepassociation.org>

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