

Study Skills: Sleep Habits (General Tips)

Location

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Description

WHAT IS MEANT BY SLEEP HYGIENE? "Sleep hygiene" is a term used to describe healthy sleep habits that can improve the ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Healthy sleep habits include, but are not limited to the following:

• QUANTITY: Adequate duration of sleep (For adults, 7-9 hours per night is recommended by leading sleep experts).

• QUALITY: Uninterrupted in a quiet, dark and cool/comfortable temperature environment with loose clothing without heavy food/beverages, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine or electronic devices (e.g., TVs, computers, smart phones, tablets, etc.).

• REGULARITY: Consistent sleep schedule (e.g., going to bed and waking up at the same times every day, including weekends and vacations, etc.).

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF POOR SLEEP HYGIENE?

• Excessive sleepiness during awake/"daytime" hours

• Weight gain/loss

• Errors/accidents due to drowsiness

• Degrades memory

• Difficulty focusing (thereby impacting ability to perform on tests and other academic tasks)

• Moodiness and general negative affect on mental health (e.g., contributing to anxiety disorders, etc.)

• Decreased reaction time

• Weakens immune system

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON SLEEP DISORDERS? Some estimate that one third of people have or have had a sleeping disorder at some stage in their life. Common sleep disorders include, but are not limited to the following:

• INSOMNIA: Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

• SLEEP DEPRIVATION: Not obtaining adequate total sleep (e.g., less than recommended 7-9 hours of sleep per night, etc.).

• OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA: Airway gets blocked repeatedly, causing individuals to stop breathing during sleep. Sleep disruptions can occur for 1-2 minutes, 100+ times per night.

• NARCOLEPSY: Uncontrollable excessive sleeping tendency.

• SNORING: Sound of turbulence in the back of the throat.

• RESTLESS LEG SYNDROME (RLS): A neurological sleep disorder that makes individuals have an overwhelming urge to move their legs, thus making it difficult to get quality sleep.

An objective evaluation of sleep can be diagnosed by a board certified sleep physician in an in-lab sleep study. Some sleep tests can be conducted at home. For further tips on disease management, visit sleepeducation.org/disease-detection.

CAN AN INDIVIDUAL QUALIFY FOR DISABILITY BENEFITS IF THEY HAVE A SLEEPING DISORDER? It depends on the severity of the sleep disorder and if it has caused other serious medical complications. Students should consult their doctors and a Social Security Benefits attorney for advice.

CAN PEOPLE "CATCH UP ON SLEEP"? No. According to the Harvard Medical study, [Uncovering Residual Effects of Chronic Sleep Loss on Human Performance](#), "people cannot get "extra sleep" to make up for sleep deprivation. For a summary of the Harvard sleep study, visit sleepfoundation.org.

HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY (E.G., COMPUTERS, ELECTRONIC DEVICES, ETC.) IMPACT SLEEP? According to [Sleep.org](https://sleep.org), the blue light emitted by the screens on computers, cellphones, televisions, restrain the production of melatonin, the hormone that controls sleep/wake cycles also known as circadian rhythms. Reduced melatonin makes it more difficult to fall asleep and to stay asleep. Electronic devices keep the brain alert by keeping individuals engaged and they can wake individuals up from sleep.

HOW CAN COLLEGE STUDENTS MAINTAIN A HEALTHY SLEEPING HYGIENE? Students can do the following:

• AWARENESS: Maintain a sleep diary to track sleeping habits, including quantity, quality and regularity.

• BEHAVIORAL: Exercise well before bedtime, manage stress, limit food/beverage/caffeine/alcohol/nicotine intake prior to bedtime, establish a relaxing bedtime routine (e.g., meditation, breathing exercises, etc.), limit bed/bedroom to sleep and sex (no working/studying in bed, only recreational reading).

• ENVIRONMENTAL: Dark, quiet, cool/comfortable temperature, with no electronic devices, loose clothing, clean hypoallergenic bedding.

• EQUIPMENT/TECHNOLOGY: Medical equipment (e.g., Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machine, anti-snoring mouthpiece, nasal strips, etc.), apps to track and regulate sleep habits, [use of blue light filter/adjust settings to limit blue light](#) on electronic devices at night.

• MEDICATION: Over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications can be taken to help individuals fall asleep and stay asleep. However, long-term use should be avoided. Students should consult with their doctors for the best remedies (medication and others) to help with their sleep hygiene.

Additional resources used in this overview: [American Academy of Sleep Medicine \(AASM\)](#), [American Sleep Association](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), [Sleep Education](#),

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