

To Sleep, Perchance to Succeed

February 2010

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It's mid-afternoon and you are heading to your next class. With a yawn, you take your seat and the lecture begins. Within a few minutes, your eyelids begin to feel heavy. The professor's voice becomes a distant murmur as you fight with your body to stay awake..... Suddenly, you are startled awake by the sound of rustling papers and students moving out of their seats. You can hardly believe that you slept through the entire class!

It is likely that you have, yourself, experienced the “classroom snooze” or seen someone else fall victim to it. Dozing off in class can create unease as students try to catch up and find out what they missed during their naptime. In its entirety, this situation wastes valuable time and is not very productive. It can really set a student back academically. After all, the saying goes, “You snooze, you lose!”

For many students, the problem of the “classroom snooze” can be remedied with a good night's sleep. Because most students are quite physically and mentally active, it is recommended that the average university student needs **7 to 8** hours of sleep a night. Unfortunately, for many students, sleep is dispensable, and the first thing to go when workload increases. Any decrease in the total number of sleeping hours contributes to what is called a “sleep debt.” Constant all-nighters and late nights watching TV contribute to the debt. The only way to reduce your sleep debt is by catching up with more hours of sleep. Most often, this debt is never repaid. This then results in the drowsy stupor that you may find yourself feeling while sitting in class. ***

There are many other reasons why a sufficient amount of sleep is necessary. Lack of sleep, or sleeping at odd and non-patterned hours can:

- have an impact on learning and memory.
- make you irritable and impatient – which makes it difficult to complete tasks and study
- interfere with the body's anabolic or building process. Sleep restores the body's energy supplies and muscle tissue, strengthens the immune system, revives brain cells, and reduces fatigue and stress.
- play havoc with your body's biological clock (known as your circadian rhythm). This may make it more difficult and take more time to fall asleep when needed.

Overall, sleep deprivation can have a major impact on you – *your brain and your body* may not be able to perform at optimal levels.

If you're finding it difficult to fall asleep at night, try these 'sleep-healthy' habits:

- 1) Exercise regularly! But no strenuous exercise within 2-3 hours of bedtime.
- 2) Avoid daytime napping.
- 3) Eliminate caffeine intake before bed
- 4) Relax and wind down before sleeping. Watch TV or read for pleasure.
- 5) Associate your bed with sleep only. Avoid studying on it!

- 6) Cut out heavy meals late in the evening.
- 7) Try a warm shower or a glass of milk for its sleep inducing effect.
- 8) If you can't sleep, avoid tossing and turning in your bed, and constantly checking your alarm clock. Get up and engage in something relaxing like listening to soothing music.

Achieving a healthy sleep pattern and eliminating sleep debt can help combat the "classroom snooze". Feeling refreshed and rejuvenated can help you enjoy the day more. Also, being alert and awake can help set you up for academic success!

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MAC Sleep Stats

The NCHA (National College Health Assessment) **McMaster University** Survey (n=950) conducted in Spring 2009 indicated that in the previous 7 days:

- 44% of students had felt tired, dragged out, or sleepy during the day, for 3-5 of those days

Sleep Facts

- Sleep debt can cause 'micro sleep' in which your brain enters sleep mode for 10-60 seconds, causing a temporary 'black-out'.
- Short-term sleep restriction can result in reduced glucose tolerance, and increased blood pressure.
- Short naps of 20-30 minutes can work wonders for alertness. More than this, however, can make it difficult to sleep at night.

Do you suffer from sleep debt?

- ✓ Do you need a loud alarm clock to wake you in the morning?
- ✓ Do you sometimes sleep through the alarm?
- ✓ Do you find getting out of bed in the morning is a struggle?
- ✓ Do you find that a single beer/alcoholic drink seems to have a noticeable effect on you?
- ✓ Do you sleep longer on weekends than you normally do during the week?
- ✓ Do you find yourself getting sleep while you are sitting and reading?
- ✓ Have you sometimes found yourself getting extremely sleepy when you are driving?

*** Adapted from <http://www.stanford.edu/~dement/sleepless.html>

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080512145824.htm>