

Sleep and College Life

by James R. Oelschlager, Psy.D.

Did you know that....

- Getting 6-8 hours less sleep than usual over a week can impair mental efficiency and reaction time, and cause depression, anxiety and irritability
- Nicotine is a stimulant and smokers have difficulty falling asleep and don't sleep as well
- Alcohol may help someone fall asleep, but their sleep will be more restless and less effective
- Consuming caffeine 3-6 hours before bedtime can double the time it takes to fall asleep, and quadruple the number of times a person wakes in the night
- College students today sleep an average of two hours less per day than college students in the 1980s

As college students, many of us have grown used to sleepless nights, be it as a result of long nights of studying, finishing assignments we have put off until the last minute, or partying a bit too hard. Regardless of the reasons, we have all experienced the effects of sleepless nights although the effects are not always immediately apparent. Many of us do not really understand the dynamics of sleep nor do we recognize the purpose and the importance of sleep. This brochure will provide a basic overview of sleep and how to control it rather than having lack of sleep control you!

Purpose of Sleep

Sleep is the body's way of rejuvenating itself. This process helps replenish the energy stores we have depleted throughout the day, as well as give our organs the opportunity to rest. Sleep relaxes us and helps with the overall health of the central nervous system. Lack of sleep can lead to deficiencies in concentration, reaction time and overall alertness. Of course, these effects are of great importance for students in all majors, but more so for aeronautics

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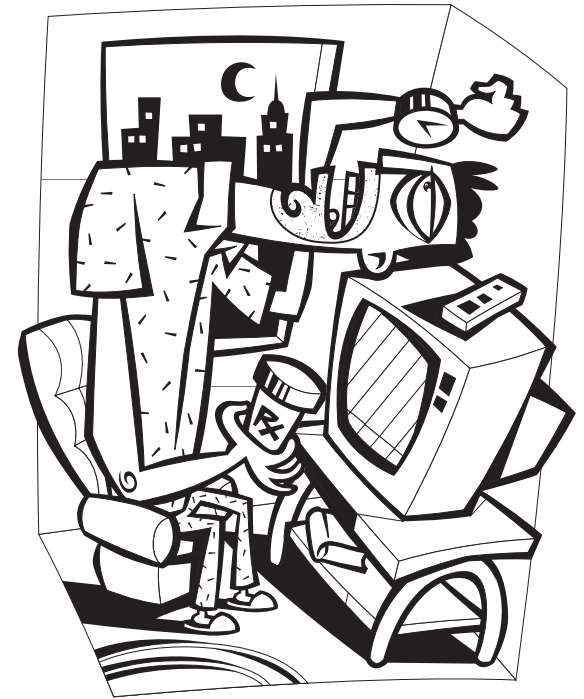
students who have flight responsibilities. Research in lack of sleep has also shown a link to reduced athletic performance for those of you who are athletes.

During sleep, we usually pass through five phases of sleep: stages 1, 2, 3 and 4, and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. These stages progress in a cycle from stage 1 to REM sleep, then the cycle starts over again with stage 1. We spend almost 50 percent of our total sleep time in stage 2 sleep, about 20 percent in REM sleep, and the remaining 30 percent in the other stages. Infants, by contrast, spend about half of their sleep time in REM sleep. When we switch into REM sleep, our breathing becomes more rapid, irregular and shallow, our eyes jerk rapidly in various directions, and our limb muscles become temporarily paralyzed. Our heart rate increases and our blood pressure rises. When people awaken during REM sleep, they often describe bizarre and illogical tales/dreams.

Sleep appears necessary for our nervous systems to work properly. Too little sleep leaves us drowsy and unable to concentrate the next day. It also leads to impaired memory and physical performance, and reduced ability to carry out math calculations. If sleep deprivation continues, hallucinations and mood swings may develop.

How Much Sleep Do You Need

Students often wake after several hours of sleep and wonder why they still feel tired. Sleep specialists indicate that the number of hours spent sleeping is not as important as the quality of sleep. The best way to determine if you are getting enough sleep is by how



you feel the next day. If you wake up irritable, tired and unenergetic, you probably are not getting all of the sleep you need. Sleep deprivation or a reduction in the amount of sleep we require is cumulative; however, the fact still remains that one good night of sleep will make up for several nights of lost sleep. Typically, an average person sleeps seven to eight hours each night. How do you then explain those who sleep less than the average? These people are generally more active, sociable, ambitious and extroverted, while those who sleep more than eight hours a night have been found to be introverted, critical and significant worriers. Sleeping too much or too little may be one of the warning signs of physical, emotional or behavioral problems.

Common causes of sleep difficulties

Sleep problems or insomnia are traditionally classified as non-specific medical problems, which may have many causes. Emotional factors such as anxiety, depression, life stressors, or disturbing thoughts at bedtime may create sleep difficulties. Other causes may be physical or medical conditions, drug/alcohol use and even withdrawal from

these substances, including nicotine and caffeine. Behavioral issues or poor sleep habits such as naps during the day, irregular sleep time, or excessive stimulation at bedtime may also cause sleep difficulties. Although medical issues such as sleep apnea may cause sleep difficulties, in college-age students these medical issues are generally rare.

Methods to enhance sleep

1. Forego regular exercise at bedtime. Although physical activity is good, exercising before bedtime may actually make it more difficult to go to sleep.
2. Finish eating a large meal a minimum of three hours before going to bed.
3. Have a set bed time as well as sleep time, allowing variation of only one hour, even on weekends.
4. Avoid caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants in the late afternoon and evening.
5. Try not to use your bedroom for activities other than sleep. Some of these may include television watching, studying, etc.
6. Create a bedroom environment that is comfortable for sleep. Try, if possible, to keep it cool, dark and noise-free.
7. Find a comfortable mattress and pillow.
8. Read a relaxing book, or listen to soothing music before getting into bed.
9. If stressful thoughts or problems are on you mind, try writing them down to put them out of your mind for the night.
10. If you are unable to sleep, get out of bed and engage in something interesting or productive until you feel sleepy again.
11. Avoid alcohol—although alcohol may help you fall asleep, the resulting sleep is fragmented and of poor quality.
12. Relaxation techniques that can be easily learned and have no side effects will enhance sleep significantly.
13. Accept that sleep is just as important to your functioning as exercise and nutrition.

What to do if you can't sleep

1. Make an appointment at Counseling and Psychological Services at 674-8050.
2. Make an appointment at the university's Health Center for a check up.

Helpful Web Links

www.sleepfoundation.org
www.webmd.com

Additional articles and student support are available on the CAPS Web site at www.fit.edu/caps/

Counseling and Psychological Services

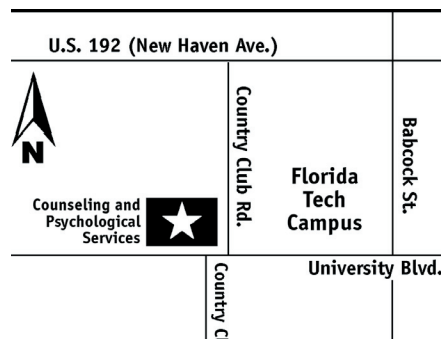
CAPS is a counseling facility available to Florida Tech students and their dependents. Its goal is to promote the best possible academic, vocational and emotional health.

Center Hours

Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location

CAPS is located at the intersection of Country Club Road and University Blvd., west of Babcock Street.



Florida Institute of Technology

Counseling and Psychological Services
 150 W. University Blvd.
 Melbourne, FL 32901-6975
 (321) 674-8050

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