

Sleep-deprived College Students: Asleep at the Wheel

March 3 2010, By Sylviane Duval

College students are getting 45 minutes less sleep per night than 40 years ago, and two hours less than the nine recommended by the National Sleep Foundation — putting them at risk of motor vehicle accidents, a small new study suggests.

These findings appear online in the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#). Study authors asked some 1,000 undergraduates to complete a diary first thing every morning for one week to record the quantity and quality of their sleep and their use of drugs and alcohol to alter sleep patterns. Participants also answered questions related to drowsiness and driving.

The results document a disturbing trend: 60 percent of students use stimulants and 18 percent use medication or alcohol to combat their natural sleep-wake cycle and to balance their jobs, social activities and study load. The irregular [sleep patterns](#) — amplified on the weekends — and resulting sleep deprivation can lead to depression, headaches, poor academic performance and social skills, and daytime drowsiness; hence, the [car accidents](#).

The authors also found that males were nearly twice as likely to use alcohol as a sleep aid than females and a third more likely to fall asleep at the wheel.

“This study supports what many others have found: insufficient sleep is epidemic,” said Daniel Taylor, lead study author and an assistant professor at the University of North Texas. “It is perhaps more

problematic in [young adults](#) because their coping methods — alcohol and substances, skipping homework/class or just pushing through their sleep — set them up for such severe consequences such as addictions and potentially fatal car crashes.”

Since sleep deprivation in college students can have such far-reaching effects on society, the authors recommend that researchers focus on ways to improve the duration and quality of students’ sleeping habits and wean them from their dependency on drugs and medication to manage their lives.

Dr. Roger Godbout, director of the Sleep Laboratory and Clinic at the Hôpital Rivi re-des-Prairies, in Montreal, said that scientific data on sleep among college students are scarce. He said he hopes that the growing amount of literature on the subject will drive future research on the causal relationships between [sleep](#) and daytime behavior in [college students](#), a suspected connection solely based on anecdotal reports up to now.

More information: Taylor DJ, Bramoweth AD. Patterns and consequences of inadequate sleep in college students: substance use and motor vehicle accidents. J Adolesc Health online, 2010.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

Citation: Sleep-deprived College Students: Asleep at the Wheel (2010, March 3) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-03-sleep-deprived-college-students-asleep-wheel.html>

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