

Wakeup call for college students: New research finds you need to catch more z's

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University of Cincinnati research finds that college students could be undermining their own education, simply because they're not practicing proper sleep habits. The study, led by Adam Knowlden, a UC doctoral student in UC's Health Promotion and Education Program, also holds recommendations for students to form better sleep habits that will ultimately enhance their learning.

The study evaluated the sleep habits of nearly 200 undergraduate [college students](#) between the ages of 18 and 24 who were not living with a parent or legal guardian. The study included 130 [females](#) and 67 males who were mostly first-and-second-year college students. The majority of them also worked either full or part-time jobs as they were going to college.

The study surveyed student sleeping habits over a 24-hour period against national recommendations for adults to get at least seven-to-eight hours of sleep. Only 24 percent of the students who were surveyed reported getting [adequate sleep](#) – 54.8 percent reported getting under seven hours of sleep, while 20.8 percent reported sleeping more than eight hours.

Short-term effects of inadequate sleep affect concentration and memory, which is what students need to learn and to pay attention in lectures.

"Sleep helps us save energy. It repairs cells in the body. And it's key for memory consolidation," Knowlden explains. "During sleep, the brain acts like a hard-drive on a computer. It goes in and cleans up memories

and makes connections stronger, and it gets rid of things it doesn't need."

"So if a student is sleep-deprived, it affects the whole process," Knowlden says. "Students aren't able to learn, they're not able to remember, it's harder to concentrate and it affects mood. They're working their way through college and they're not maximizing their learning potential," he says.

Knowlden says the survey found that time management, financial concerns and stress management were all factors in why students were reporting they were sacrificing sleep.

He adds that if they're not practicing proper sleep habits, they can't catch up on the weekend. "It's like a bank account. If you try to take what's not there, it's not going to work. You can't make up for it once you miss it – you either get it or you don't."

Knowlden explains that the health term for setting up proper sleep habits involves proper sleep hygiene, or proper planning for a good night's sleep. He adds that the benefits stretch beyond not feeling sleepy or grumpy the next day.

"It's difficult to change habits, especially sleep habits, but if students really want to make a difference in maximizing their education and their learning experience, getting enough sleep is critical," says Knowlden.

"I've taught a stress management class here at UC and I've told [students](#) before that if they get nothing else out of this class, they need to remember to get seven or eight hours of sleep each night."

Proper sleep hygiene means setting up a proper bedtime ritual to enhance sleep, Knowlden says. Here's what he recommends they avoid:

- Restrict caffeine, alcohol and nicotine within one hour of bedtime.
- Avoid intense exercise within one hour of bedtime.
- Avoid going to bed and getting up at different times.
- Avoid long naps – a 15-minute "power nap" is enough.
- Avoid Internet social networking and games (considered stressors that keep the mind alert) before bedtime.
- Avoid studying, reading, eating or watching TV in bed as part of the bedtime routine.
- Eliminate too much light and noise in the bedroom.

Here's what they should do:

- Keep bedtime and waking time consistent.
- Set up a comfortable sleeping environment – not too bright, too cold, too hot or too noisy. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows.
- Use the bed for sleep, not for studying for exams.
- Turn to relaxing [sleep](#) routines such as relaxation exercises or the student's personal religious ritual.
- Writing out worries in a personal journal can also ease stress.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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