Medical Xpress

Study finds pre-bed routine vital for a good night's sleep

June 21 2016, by David Stacey

Credit: University of Western Australia

The science of sleep is the latest weapon being used by Perth's top women's basketball team with research carried out with The University of Western Australia offering hope to anyone who struggles to sleep through the night.

Sleep studies carried out with the Perth Lynx during the 2015/16 season found that changing the pre-bed routine of the state's premier basketballers led to better sleep and improved performance on the court, a lesson that researchers say can be applied to all.

Ian Dunican from UWA's Centre for Sleep Science said the Lynx, runners-up in the Women's National Basketball League Grand Final,

wanted to find a performance edge and looked to UWA at the start of their season to help find it.

"In this day and age, coaches and trainers are looking at every single element of an athlete's life and what contributes to a team's performance both on and off the field," Mr Dunican said.

"We split the Lynx's season into two halves and then looked at the sleep cycles or chronotype or circadian rhythms, pre-bed routines and training regime of each individual player, including the academy players."

Mr Dunican said the players were fitted with actigraphy sleep monitoring devices and were asked to keep detailed sleep diaries, with biomathematical modelling used to analyse the results.

"We were able to give each player an individual report and guidance and while in general the athletes were getting reasonably good sleep, we found that for those that weren't, changing the pre-bed routine was key.

"That included things like switching off all electronics at least an hour before bed to calm the mind, using mindfulness or meditation apps and sleeping in a cool room, which might sound obvious but are all incredibly important," he said.

One of the major recommendations coming out of the study for the Lynx was that their training sessions be held in the afternoons, which suited the circadian rhythms of most of the athletes.

Lynx strength and conditioning coach Josh Cavanagh said the study highlighted the importance of sleep routines.

"The research helped to bring the attention that we pay to sleeping routines to the forefront of our minds," Mr Cavanagh said.

"In terms of travel and sleeping on the road, it gave us a better idea of how to manage sleep while changing time zones, which helps us to avoid fatigue for away games."

Lynx forward Natalie Burton said the sleep study was beneficial in helping to prevent fatigue.

"The data collected from the sleep studies enabled our coaches to make informed decisions around the timing of flights, training sessions and rest periods to make sure we were performing at our best and minimising fatigue," Ms Burton said.

Professor Peter Eastwood, who heads UWA's Centre for Sleep Science, said one or two of the players had results suggesting that they might be suffering from common sleep disorders like insomnia, sleep apnoea and restless legs and were referred to a sleep physician for follow up.

"Research over the past 15 years has resulted in an explosive growth in our understanding of the consequences of poor sleep," Professor Eastwood said.

"We spend a third of our lives asleep and most of us wake the next day feeling refreshed and rested but for those individuals who have sleep disorders or poor sleep habits that's not the case."

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Study finds pre-bed routine vital for a good night's sleep (2016, June 21) retrieved 4 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-06-pre-bed-routine-vital-good-night.html

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