

Why do we sacrifice sleep?

November 17 2016, by Kevin Sliman



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Sleeping well is often cited as a key method of improving one's health and well-being. But when the challenges of life require more hours in the day than a person has available, sleep is often sacrificed.

"If you are sleeping at a regular time, you don't need an [alarm clock](#) to get up, and you feel rested, then you are probably getting enough [sleep](#)," said Orfeu Buxton, associate professor of [biobehavioral health](#) at Penn

State. "Unfortunately, that is probably the minority of people."

According to Buxton, many of us have too many demands on our time, and there is not enough time to get sleep and do the things that we have to do.

"Generally, people would say that they feel better and are probably a better person when they've slept," Buxton said. "If that's the case, why do so few of us actually get enough sleep?"

The reason, he suggests, is that most people do not have sleep as a foundational priority in their life—the teen who answers texts through the night or the middle-aged adult who watches TV late into the night.

"Don't look at it as giving up activities for sleep," Buxton said. "That is framing it incorrectly."

For behavior change to stick, it has to be associated with a positive outcome. For example, getting better sleep must be strongly associated with feeling better the next day, Buxton said.

"Conversely, if you're really tired one day, associate it with an earlier behavior, such as staying out late," Buxton said. "When people don't get enough sleep, they have more stressors and negative things occur the next day. It's probably not just bad luck."

Buxton acknowledged that it is not always simple. Sometimes the things that keep people awake are serious challenges that individuals face daily, such as working three jobs to pay the bills or worrying about neighborhood crime. However, when [people](#) can adjust their priorities, they should, he said.

"Priorities define who you are," Buxton said. "The greatest

accomplishments in life are not carrying the muddy pack up the hill. They're creative endeavors or interpersonal moments. And those are best experienced rested."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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