

# Looking to start the school year off on the right foot? Get more sleep

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There is a palpable buzz at the beginning of every school year on campus. There are new classes, new professors and new friends to make. The start of a new school year—not unlike New Year's Eve—is often

accompanied by an optimistic outlook to do better, be better and accomplish more.

As you think about the strategies you might use to achieve these ends, consider the merits of getting more shut-eye.

The old adage of the importance of getting eight [hours of sleep](#) at night exists for a reason. Sleep plays a crucial role in washing away the waste that gets built up between our [brain cells](#) as a result of all the thinking we do every day.

Sleep helps us transform our short-term memories into long-term ones. Getting a good night's sleep also makes you more alert, attentive and able to concentrate. Do you see a theme emerging? If you think about the things needed to do well in school, many of them align with the things that a good night's sleep helps to promote.

But it's not just in the classroom where sleep will benefit you. Many [student-athletes](#) are looking for ways to find that extra edge to outperform their competitors. Why consider more sleep? It aids in muscle recovery, increases reactions times and ensures your immune system is humming on all cylinders. Again, these are things essential to being able to perform at one's peak abilities.

Don't take my word for it. Professional athletes like LeBron James, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and Cristiano Ronaldo all consider sleep to be a critical part of their regimen for success.

Then there's the growing body of evidence suggesting that a lack of sleep can increase symptoms of depression, anxiety and irritability. There is also evidence that a lack of sleep decreases self-control. Given the known links between lack of self-control, [poor health](#) and problematic behavior, it might come as no surprise that young adults who consistently

sleep less than eight hours at night are more likely to be overweight, to engage in risk-taking behavior (e.g., texting and driving), to use drugs and to engage in violence.

So, what can you do in order to get more restful, high quality sleep at night and boost your chances of starting the new academic year right?

Stop drinking caffeinated beverages after 3 p.m. Caffeine is a stimulant. It makes it harder for you to fall asleep when you want. While this might seem obvious, what is less widely known is that it takes several hours for caffeine to be fully metabolized by the body. Pulling an all-nighter studying for exams by slamming back energy drinks? You would be better served going to bed at 9 p.m. without any caffeine in your system and waking up at 5 a.m. well-rested and ready to do more studying. Better yet, don't wait until the night before the exam to start studying

Stop using electronics an hour before going to sleep. If you aren't familiar with blue light, it's a wavelength of light that is emitted by TVs, phones, computers and tablets. It suppresses melatonin, which helps our brains to shut down and fall asleep. Of course, if you can't let go of your phone before bed, you can purchase blue-light blocking glasses on the cheap, and many TVs, computers and phones have settings that can reduce [blue light](#) emission (e.g., the "night" mode on smart phone apps like Twitter).

Avoid alcohol. If you're thinking a good buzz may help you fall sleep more quickly, you should know that the quality of that sleep will not do much with regard to helping you earn better grades. This is because alcohol reduces [rapid eye movement](#) (REM) sleep, which helps your brain retain what you have learned during the day.

**More information:** For more information on the role sleep plays in health and behavior, recommendations for nightly sleep by age and tips

for improving your sleep, visit the National Sleep Foundation website:  
[www.sleepfoundation.org/](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/)

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