

Sleep quality

University students are known for their variable sleep schedules and among the most sleep-deprived adults. Whereas a normal adult might require an average of 8 hours sleep per night, one study found that most university students only slept an average of five to six hours per night (Brown, Bubholtz & Soper, 2002).

The impact of sleep deprivation

Poor sleep quality has been shown to negatively impact an individual's health, cognitive functioning and mental wellness (e.g., depression and anxiety). For university students it is important to note that one's grades can be negatively impacted by sleep deprivation because concentration, memory and the ability to learn are compromised.

Tips for a good night's sleep

A number of practical considerations can assist you in improving your ability to get a good night's sleep:

- Physical activity
 - Do get some form of physical exercise every day.
 - Don't do any strenuous exercise 3-4 hours before going to bed.
- Daytime naps
 - Do take a short nap during the day, should you feel tired.
 - Don't nap longer than 30 minutes, and preferably do it before 3 p.m.
- Caffeine and nicotine
 - Both are stimulants; if possible avoid taking these after lunch time.
- Alcohol
 - Although drinking may help you fall asleep, it will likely disrupt your sleep pattern.
 - It's best to avoid drinking alcohol 6 hours before going to bed.
- Sleep schedule
 - Do try and go to bed and wake up at more or less the same time every day.
 - On the weekend, don't sleep in more than one hour longer than your normal wake-up time.
 - Don't depend on the weekends to catch up on sleep, as this habit will further disrupt your sleeping pattern.
- Use your bed only for sex and sleeping.
 - It's best to not lay in bed to watch series, do web-browsing or even to study. The bed should not be associated with these 'activating' tasks.
- Go to bed only when you are sleepy.
 - If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, rather get up and do some type of relaxing activity outside of your bedroom until you feel sleepy again. This can include deep breathing and relaxation exercises.
- Waking up during the night
 - It's best not to switch on any bright lights should you wake up during the night, as this disrupts your brain's natural sleep pattern.

- Rather lay back in the dark (perhaps cover your eyes) and strive to rid your mind of planning and worry, do relaxation or deep-breathing exercises, or listen to soft music until you fall asleep again.

For more information regarding sleep quality and sleep disorders see <http://search.usa.gov/search?affiliate=hip&query=sleep> or contact the RU Counselling Centre for assistance (tel. 046-603-7070).

Reference

Brown, F.C., Buboltz Jr, W.C. & Soper, B. (2002) Relationship of sleep hygiene awareness, sleep hygiene practices, and sleep quality in university students. *Behavioral Medicine* 28(1): 33–38.