

A recent Wellness Survey of SUNY-Fredonia students has revealed that lack of sleep is a primary concern. Getting a good night's sleep can be difficult for college students for many reasons. Schedules are irregular, academic work and social opportunities often keep people up late, and dorm rooms and apartments are seldom as comfortable or quiet as the bedrooms in people's family homes.

It is important not to minimize this issue. So many aspects of life can be negatively impacted by a lack of sufficient sleep.

Sleep matters. A lack of sleep can lead to:

- Diminished concentration and memory and a lowered GPA.
- Irritability and an increased likelihood of conflict with friends.
- A weakened immune system and greater likelihood of coming down with colds, flu or other illnesses.
- An increased sense of stress and a more negative mood.
- Daytime drowsiness, which can be extremely dangerous when driving.

Try these tips to improve your sleep:

- As much as possible, keep a regular schedule for sleep. Try not to change your schedule too dramatically on the weekends.
- Too much napping can interfere with nighttime sleep. If you do nap, try to make it a half hour nap in mid-afternoon.
- Get regular exercise, but try to complete your exercise a few hours before you go to bed.
- Watch your use of caffeine, alcohol and other substances. If you are having trouble sleeping, reduce or eliminate caffeine use, especially in the afternoon and evening. Alcohol may seem like a sleep aid, but it actually inhibits deep and restful sleep.
- Avoid eating shortly before going to bed.
- Turn off bright lights and TV and computer screens half hour before going to bed. Try instead to have a pleasant ritual during that last half hour of your day. You might read, listen to music, talk on the phone or in person to a friend, practice meditation or prayer, or keep a gratitude journal in which you list the day's positive events and encounters.
- As much as possible, keep your bedroom dark and cool. For most people an ideal temperature for sleep is 68 degrees.
- If worry keeps you awake, try writing down the things you need to remember before you begin your bedtime ritual. Then remind yourself that your list will be there in the morning. When you go to bed, focus on positive, relaxing thoughts. Remember that this is YOUR time, and even if you don't go to sleep right away, you can enjoy pleasant thoughts and rest.
- If you can't sleep, try getting up for a while and doing something that is likely to make you drowsy. Reading a textbook often promotes drowsiness, and if it doesn't, at least you'll be getting something done!
- Be cautious in your use of sleep aids. Many do little more than remove the memory of wakefulness, and some may create dependency or worsen daytime drowsiness. It is a good idea to consult your doctor before taking any medication to improve sleep.
- A visit to the Counseling Center may be helpful. Talking through your concerns may help overall to reduce stress, and your counselor may be able to offer you additional tips for improving sleep.

Try these websites for more information on improving sleep:

- www.sleepeducation.com
- www.sleepfoundation.org
- <http://www.onlinecolleges.net/.../10-ways-to-get-a-good-nights-sleep-while-living-in-a-dorm-room/>

For an interesting discussion of sleep and college students, read this piece by the famous sleep researcher Dr. William Dement: <http://www.stanford.edu/~dement/sleepless.html>.

If you are still having difficulty after trying these techniques, your doctor or insurance company may be able to refer you to a sleep clinic for comprehensive evaluation and treatment. Sweet Dreams!