**Zzzzzz Time: Sleep Does More than Bring You Sweet Dreams**

**Proper sleep habits in college improve health and cognitive performance**

There’s no getting around it—sleep matters.

To be your best—academically, socially, athletically, physically—you must sleep for at least eight hours a night. Some say that the last two hours of the night’s sleep are the most important, so continually restricting yourself to six hours or less will take its toll.

Find helpful tips below on how to avoid student sleep deprivation.

**Avoid the College All-Nighter for Better Health**

The all-nighter is almost a cliché, and many students will stay up through the night either studying or socializing. But keep in mind that sleep deprivation has been proven to impair mental function—and weaken the immune system. According to the National Sleep Foundation, although we think of sleep as a time of rest, research is revealing that sleep is a dynamic activity during which many processes vital to health and well-being take place. New evidence shows that sleep is essential to helping maintain mood, memory, and cognitive performance.

**Take Charge of Your Sleep Habits**

Going away to college may be the first time you’ll be in charge of your sleep habits. Mom isn’t there to urge you to bed, nor is she there as your back-up alarm. With this freedom comes the temptation to slide into a bad habit of staying up late, oversleeping and missing class, and then taking a long afternoon nap—which prevents you from going to sleep at a reasonable time that night as well.

Sticking to a sleep schedule makes sense, and gives you more control of your life. Experts advise trying to go to bed around the same time each night and, just as importantly, waking up at about the same time every morning. Even on weekends, try not to deviate too much from your sleep schedule. Sure, most college students stay up later on Friday and Saturday nights, but don’t mess up your pattern so drastically that you can’t go to sleep at your normal time on Sunday night.

**Tips for a Better Night’s Sleep**

If you have trouble sleeping, see if soft sheets and a cushy mattress topper help. Some students use a white-noise machine to block out sounds of the residence hall. If your roommate has different sleep times than you, have a friendly discussion about your needs and their needs and how you can help one another.

Relying on pills to stay awake or to fall asleep is dangerous. “Students who use caffeine-type pills often experience stomach upset and aren’t alert for the very test they were studying for,” points out Sandra Combs, RN, director of the health center at Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina. “It’s much smarter to get the sleep you need.

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