



# Fact Sheet

2005

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## Student Health Services Texas A&M University

### Sleep and the College Student

#### Statistics – National

- According to the [National Sleep Foundation](#), 74% of adults are experiencing a sleep problem a few nights a week or more, 39% of adults get less than 7 hours of sleep each weeknight, and 1 in 3 adults are so sleepy during the day that it interferes with daily activities.
- In a survey conducted on the TAMU campus in the spring of 2001, the 7 days prior to being surveyed, 7.6% of TAMU students got enough sleep to where they felt rested when they woke up in the morning.
- 24.2% of TAMU students received a lower grade on an exam, in a course, or had to drop a course due to sleep difficulties.

#### How much sleep do you need?

Healthy adults need an average of 8 hours sleep a night – some are able to function with 6 hours while others need at least 10.

#### Why do you need sleep?

Lack of sleep can lead to...

- health problems
- excessive daytime sleepiness
- impaired ability to perform tasks with memory, learning, and logical reasoning
- absenteeism from work or school
- tension, depression, and confusion
- generally lower life satisfaction
- more frequent use of marijuana, alcohol, and other stimulants
- increased risk of unintentional injuries and death

#### Causes of sleep problems

- Psychological – stress, depression
- Lifestyle – alcohol, caffeine, exercising too close to bedtime
- Shift work
- Jet lag
- Environment – too hot/cold, noisy, bright, interruptions, comfort/size of bed, sleep partner
- Physical – pain, sleep apnea (difficulty breathing), pregnancy, PMS, menopause
- Medications

#### Secrets to good sleep

- The first step is to exam your diet, exercise patterns, sleeping environment, personal habits, lifestyle, and current concerns.

- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol in the late afternoon and evening - caffeine and nicotine are stimulants and could delay sleep while alcohol may help you get to sleep but it actually increases the number of times you awaken during the night
- Avoid spicy foods or foods with tomato products that are more prone to giving people heartburn
- Avoid drinking too many fluids
- Avoid eating too much or too close to bedtime
- Don't nap during the day – if you need to take a short nap, only sleep for 20-30 min
- Exercise regularly – do so at least 3 hours (preferably 5-6) before bedtime to give yourself time to cool down
- Try a relaxing routine – soak in a bath or hot tub before bedtime, read a book
- Don't use your bed for anything other than sleep or sex – your body may begin associating the bed with other things like studying
- Make your sleep environment as pleasant, as possible – use a fan to drown out noise and make it cooler; put shades over windows to make room less bright
- If you can't get to sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something that will help you get to sleep (i.e. watch TV, read, listen to music)
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day – even on weekends

### **Myths about drowsy driving**

- The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes are caused by drowsy drivers each year – resulting in 1,500 fatalities and 71,000 injuries.
- 55% of fall-asleep crashes involved people under age 24 with peak age occurrence being age 20.
- coffee overcomes the effects of drowsiness while driving – effects are short term with caffeine
- I can tell when I'm going to go to sleep – sleep is not voluntary – can fall asleep and not know it and cannot tell how long you have been asleep; when driving, even a few seconds of sleep is long enough to kill someone
- I'm a safe driver so it doesn't matter if I'm sleepy – the only safe driver is an alert driver
- I can't take naps – even people who say they are not tired will fall asleep in a darkened room if they have not been getting enough sleep
- I get plenty of sleep – chances are you aren't getting enough sleep – especially if you are a college student.
- Young people need less sleep – need more and often get less

### **Signs you may be driving while drowsy**

- eyes close or go out of focus by themselves
- have trouble keeping your head up
- can't stop yawning
- have wandering, disconnected thoughts
- don't remember driving the last few miles
- drift between lanes, tailgate, or miss traffic signs
- keep jerking the car back into the lane
- have drifted off the road and narrowly missed crashing

### **How to avoid drowsy driving**

- start any trip by getting enough sleep the night before
- drive during times of day when you are normally awake
- find a place to sleep between midnight and 6am if you are traveling through the night – well lit and with lots of other people around
- ask passengers to let you know if you are showing signs of drowsiness – let someone else drive if need to
- make sure both people in the front are awake
- schedule a break every 2 hours or every 100 miles – stop sooner if you show any signs mentioned above

### **When to talk to a doctor**

- snore loudly
- stop breathing or gasp for breath during sleep (sleep apnea)
- regularly feel sleepy or doze off while watching tv, reading, driving, or engaged in daily activities
- sleep problems persist more than a week and are bothersome
- insomnia – have difficulty sleeping 3 nights a week or more (i.e. trouble falling asleep, wake frequently during the night, wake too early and cannot get back to sleep, or wake unrefreshed)
- feel unpleasant, tingling, creeping feelings, or nervousness in your legs when trying to sleep (restless leg syndrome)
- experience “sleep attacks” at any time (narcolepsy)
- sleepwalking
- often scream or fight during the night but have no memory of the even the next day

### **Resources:**

National Sleep Foundation – [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, TAMU, 2001