

Sleep Podcast

“You’re listening to the Campus Recreation’s Wellness Podcast, from the University of Northern Colorado.

The title of today’s presentation is Sleep: Theories Behind the Zzzz’s

We’ll be discussing:

- Types of Sleep Difficulties
 - The Effects of Sleep Difficulties
 - Useful Sleep Facts
 - How UNC Compares
 - And Common Treatment Approaches
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The most common types of sleep difficulties affecting college students include:

- Difficulty falling asleep, early morning waking—oftentimes without being able to fall back asleep, and daytime napping.

The effects of sleep difficulties can range from mild to severe, and includes:

- Increased tension, irritability, depression, confusion, anxiety, daytime sleepiness, general detachment, lower life satisfaction, and lower grades.
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Research has found, and it probably comes as no surprise, that sleep habits and the quality of sleep, are directly related to cognitive and academic performance.

In fact, the last half of a full night’s sleep may be the most important for the learning process—making getting too little sleep or waking too early, truly detrimental to college success. REM sleep, or dream sleep, has been found to be the most important part of the sleep cycle and is directly related to learning, memory, and concentration.

When we wake too early—either unintentionally, or for an 8:00 am class—and deprive ourselves of the last two hours of sleep, we impair our ability to learn material—making going to class—virtually useless. Unfortunately, many students believe they can “catch-up” on lost sleep during the weekend and cram for tests. This only increases our sleep difficulties and can actually increase the negative side effects. Even if we manage to learn a week’s worth of information in a weekend, when the time comes for the test—we may falter. Remember, the last half of a full night’s sleep is directly related to learning, memory, and concentration.

So, forget the cramming, study throughout the semester and get enough sleep—especially the night before the test!

While sleep deprivation—or getting less than 7-9 hours per night—may seem the most detrimental, it has been found that sleep irregularity is just as bad, if not worse. Varying your sleep and wake times by as little as 2 hours, decreases cognitive and emotional functioning. This means your accuracy on tasks requiring strenuous attention and concentration, as well as perceptual speed will be significantly diminished. Students who consistently vary their sleep patterns have greater amounts of negative feelings, including depression and general detachment.

While college life can be difficult, we may be making it harder than it has to be, simply by not regulating our sleep patterns.

The take-home message: It is better to get less sleep, but wake-up and go to bed at the same time each day, than it is to vary your sleep schedule.

Better yet, keep a consistent sleep schedule and get 7-9 hours each night.

So, how does UNC Stack Up?

Every spring semester the Wellness Program administers the National Collegiate Health Assessment—you may have seen us around Campus or have been lucky enough to have taken the survey during one of your courses.

Our NCHA data, for the University of Northern Colorado, suggests that 30% of our students experienced sleep difficulties, but felt it did not affect their academic performance.

11.7% of our students experienced sleep difficulties that they felt resulted in a lower grade on an exam, and 5.3% experienced sleep difficulties that they felt resulted in a lower grade in the entire course.

As stated previously, 30% of our students reported having sleep difficulties, but without perceived academic impact. This may be far from true and academic performance may be significantly impaired as research has found that sleep deprived students inaccurately rate their performance as better than that of individuals who are not sleep deprived.

Sadly, many students do not grasp the possible connection between their poor performance and mood and sleep deprivation.

So what can we do to get better sleep?

Common treatment approaches include: Improving our Sleep Hygiene, Exercise, Bright Light Therapy, Relaxation, Behavior Therapy, and Cognitive Therapy.

Sleep Hygiene refers to the habits, environmental factors, and practices that may influence the length and quality of one's sleep. Sleep hygiene also provides educational information about good sleep habits, foods to avoid, and lifestyle elements that can contribute to, or interfere with, a good night sleep.

Research indicates people overestimate their knowledge on sleep habits and how those habits may be related to current difficulties they are experiencing, making information on sleep hygiene easy and effective.

Our Tips:

1. Maintain a regular bedtime and waking time schedule—especially on weekends. Get up about the same time every day, regardless of what time you fell asleep.
 2. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine. Take a warm bath or shower, use aromatherapy, read, or listen to soothing music.
 3. Sleep in a room that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool; and sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow.
 4. Use your bedroom solely for sleep and intimate affairs. Have work materials, computers, and TV's in another room.
 5. Finish eating at least 2-3 hours prior to your regular bedtime
 6. Avoid caffeine within 6 hours and alcohol and smoking within 2 hours of bedtime.
 7. Exercise regularly, but finish at least a few hours before bedtime.
 8. Avoid naps
 9. Go to bed only when sleepy. Lay in bed only for sleeping, not for work or to watch TV.
 10. Try not to study, do homework, or think about problems before bedtime.
 11. After 10-15 minutes of not being able to get to sleep, go to another room to read or watch TV until you become sleepy.
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As stated above, establishing and maintaining an exercise routine can enhance sleep quality. In fact, cardiovascular exercise has been proven to increase the time spent in REM sleep. All exercise helps though, so stop by the Campus Recreation Center and attend a Group Fit Class or join an Intramural Team!

Many people have found Bright Light Therapy to be a large help when normalizing sleep patterns. Bright Light Therapy involves special lights which have been found to regulate the circadian sleep rhythm by emitting broad spectrum light. Subjects are asked to sit—doing normal activities—for approximately 30-60 minutes with full exposure to the light. Once the circadian rhythm is in line with the natural cycle, the individual should begin to experience more normal sleep patterns and have fewer sleep difficulties.

Behavior therapy has shown tremendous success in clinical studies, and most techniques are a part of our Sleep Hygiene tips. The purpose of this approach is to associate bedtime, the bed, and the bedroom with rapid sleep onset and encourage a more consistent circadian sleep-wake cycle. Behavior therapy includes: going to bed only when sleepy, using the bedroom solely for sleep and sex, moving into another room if unable to fall asleep after 15-20 minutes, returning

just when sleepy, maintaining a regular rising time in the morning regardless of sleep onset, and avoiding daytime napping.

Another successful behavior therapy is, Stimulus Control Therapy: which involves instructional procedures that involve the context of sleep and the bedroom. These procedures include the use the sleep logs to track bedtime, wake time, the total amount of sleep accumulated, dreams, and the quality of sleep. Often times, simply becoming aware of one's sleep patterns, can change sleep quality for the better.

Sleep Restriction Therapy is a type of therapy that limits the amount of time in bed to actual sleep time, and focuses on increasing the proportion of time in bed as sleep time. When the proportion of time in bed—and asleep—exceeds 85-90%, one can increase the time spent in bed by 15-20 minutes, and lowering the time in bed when the proportion falls below 80%.

Cognitive therapy seeks to help the individual overcome difficulties by identifying and changing dysfunctional thinking, behavior, and emotional responses. In regards to sleep difficulties, this approach focuses on expectations and control. Small successes represent and create control, giving one the knowledge that they are in control of their sleep patterns. For example: If waking repeatedly in the night is causing sleep difficulties, one can mimic this by trying to wake up at preplanned times and thus proving they are in control of their sleep patterns.

As stated previously, establishing a relaxing routine before bed can decrease arousal levels and ease the onset of sleep.

Techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, and cognitive imagery have proven beneficial, as well as activities such as Yoga, massage, reading, or taking a hot bath.

Remember to get 7-9 hours of sleep each night and to establish a consistent sleep and wake cycle, this way you'll be a success!

This has been a presentation from the University of Northern Colorado's, Campus Recreation, Wellness Programming. We hope you've enjoyed this presentation and be sure to download our others topics. All information regarding upcoming events and programming is located on our webpage at: www.unco.edu/campusrec.

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