Sleep for Good Health

A college student's day can be hectic, especially when trying to balance classes, homework, a job (or two), and social activities - leaving what feels like little or no time for sleep. In fact, many college students report not getting enough sleep at night and feeling tired or sleepy during the day on a regular basis. It's important to know that good sleep is vital for your student's mental and physical health, as well as their quality of life.

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Why is sleep so important for students?

Sleep is one of the most important factors in the process of learning. While sleeping, your student's brain is creating new neural pathways that support the learning they have done in class or while studying, and helps them better retain that information. Sleep also helps your student to: enhance problem-solving skills, pay attention, make decisions, and be creative!

Tips for Good Sleep

- ✔ Create a sleep schedule and stick to it.
- ✔ Exercise no later than 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- ✔ Avoid caffeine or nicotine in the afternoon or evening.
- ✔ Avoid drinking alcohol at bedtime.
- ✔ Avoid large meals right before bedtime.
- ✔ Don't take naps after 3 p.m.
- ✔ Find ways to relax before bed to get your body ready to sleep.
- ✔ Create a good sleeping environment - try to decrease light and noise.
- ✔ Turn off all electronic devices at least one hour before bedtime.
- ✔ If you can't fall asleep, get out of bed and don't go back until you feel sleepy.

Having a Conversation

For many students, college will be their first experience in managing their own schedules, including their sleep schedule. They may not understand the impact that poor sleep can have on their mental and physical health. It is important that you talk with your student about these impacts and how they can achieve a good night's sleep.

1. Talk to your student about getting the recommended hours of sleep every night. For those over the age of 18, that is 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
2. Discuss the importance of sleep on your student's academic performance. Emphasize how proper sleep habits can help increase performance in class and extracurricular activities.
3. Discuss the negative consequences of poor sleep health as listed below.
4. Talk about the effect that poor sleep health can have on driving. It is important for your student to know that driving while tired is equivalent to driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Let them know that if they are tired, they should not be getting behind the wheel.
5. Go over the "Tips for Good Sleep" and ask how they can implement these tips into their life at college.
6. Brainstorm on ways to create a good sleep environment, especially if your student will be living in the residence halls, where it can be noisy and bright even at night. For example, buy earplugs or sound machines to help cancel out noisy roommates or buy a sleep mask to block light.

Consequences of Poor Sleep Health

- Physical health issues including: high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity

- Increase in development of depression or other mental health disorders

- Decreased alertness & mental performance

- Memory & cognitive impairment

- Increased stress on interpersonal relationships

- Automobile injury - driving while tired is equivalent to driving while under the influence

Sleep and Technology

Reports show that 95% of people use some type of electronic device at least a few nights a week within an hour before bedtime.

How does technology affect sleep?

- Blue light emitted by electronics suppresses melatonin production - the hormone that controls your sleep cycle
- Activities on devices can be stimulating and increase alertness
- Electronics can disrupt sleep, especially if you receive late night calls, texts, or emails

It is recommended that students turn off all electronic devices at least one hour before bedtime to help relax, as well as turning phones on 'Silent' or 'Do Not Disturb' mode before going to sleep.

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