

# ten myths about sleep

self-regulation

*Make It Happen:*

time management  
concentration  
reading  
listening  
memory  
taking tests  
writing papers  
self-regulation  
learning styles  
motivation

Many college students do not get the **7 - 9 hours of sleep recommended** by experts for good health, safety, and maximum performance. Much of what we have learned about sleep has been discovered only within the past ten years. Help us put some traditional myths about sleep to rest.

## *Myth #1: It is worth cutting back on sleep to study.*

**Fact:** The body rests during sleep, however, the brain remains active and gets "recharged." Harvard Medical School researchers found that students who stayed up all night after learning a new task showed little improvement in their performance.

According to Director of the SPU Brain Center for Applied Learning Research, John Medina, "there is growing evidence that the reason we need to sleep is not just so that the body can physically recuperate from the day's activity, but so that the brain can learn."

## *Myth #2: Lack of sleep is not harmful.*

**Fact:** Sleep deprivation has been shown to interfere with learning and memory and has been linked to health problems such as negative mood and behavior, depression, decreased productivity, high blood pressure, hypertension, obesity, and safety issues in the home, on the job, and on the road.

Sleep deprivation can interfere with one's ability to reason and emotional well-being. Counseling could help with identifying root psychological causes of insomnia. The SPU Student Counseling Center can be reached at 206-281-2657.

## *Myth #3: You can train yourself to need less sleep.*

**Fact:** Sleep need is biological, and the amount an individual needs is genetically determined. To determine the amount of sleep your body needs, when you are fairly well rested try sleeping until you wake on your own—without an alarm clock. Feel rested? Then that's your sleep need. You can choose to sleep less but not to need less sleep.

## *Myth #4: People know when they are sleep deprived.*

**Fact:** Researchers have asked thousands of people over the years if they're sleepy, only to be told no—just before the individuals fell asleep! Many people don't know when or why they are sleep deprived.

## *Myth #5: Boredom makes you fall asleep.*

**Fact:** Boredom, like a warm or dark room, doesn't cause sleepiness, it merely unmasks it. When people are active, they usually don't feel sleepy. When they take a break from activity or feel bored, they may notice that they are sleepy.

The Center for Learning can support you in planning a healthy and consistent sleep schedule.

Refer to the CFL Time-Management handouts or make an appointment for an Individual Learning Consultation.

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***Myth #6:* If you miss a few hours of sleep one night, you can catch up the next night without any negative impact.**

**Fact:** The sleep you miss is gone forever. You can get back on schedule the next night, but you cannot "catch up" without a negative impact on your health and functioning.

According to Harvard Neuroscientist Robert Stickgold, many college students suffer from a kind of sleep bulimia in which they binge and purge sleep time. They try to get by on 3-5 hours a night during the week and sleep long hours on the weekend, thinking they will be fine. However, much of the information learned during a sleep-deprived week will not be well-integrated into memory circuits.

***Myth #7:* It doesn't matter when you sleep, as long as you get eight hours.**

**Fact:** Your sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in your brain with built-in 24-hour rhythms. It is important to maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule in order to establish restful rhythms, even on the weekends when the temptation is to sleep-in. It is also natural for humans to sleep at night; several short periods of sleep throughout the day do not have the same positive effect on learning and performance.

***Myth #8:* If you wake up in the middle of the night, it is best to lie in bed, count sheep, or toss and turn until you eventually fall back asleep.**

**Fact:** Most experts agree that if you do not fall back asleep within 15-20 minutes, you should get out of bed, go to another room, and engage in a relaxing activity such as listening to music or reading. Return to bed only when you feel sleepy. Avoid watching the clock.

***Myth #9:* Caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol will not disturb getting a good night's sleep.**

**Fact:** Caffeine is a stimulant and remains in the body on average from 3-5 hours after consumption. Even if you do not think caffeine affects you, it may be disrupting and changing the quality of your sleep. Nicotine is also a stimulant and may interfere with the amount and quality of one's sleep. Many people think of alcohol as a sedative, but it actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings and significantly interrupting the brain's ability to process learning.

***Myth #10:* Daytime sleepiness always means a person isn't getting enough sleep.**

**Fact:** Excessive daytime sleepiness can occur even after getting enough nighttime sleep and can be a sign of an underlying medical condition or sleep disorder such as narcolepsy or sleep apnea. These problems can often be treated, and symptoms should be discussed with a physician or the SPU campus Health Services Center (Appointment Desk: 206-281-2231).

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Compiled from the National Sleep Foundation ([www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)), Harvard Magazine (July-Aug. 2005), and SPU's Response Magazine (Autumn 2006).