

SLEEP

Being able to maintain a consistent sleep cycle can be particularly difficult as a college student. Factors such as living in residence halls, having a challenging schedule, completing intense academic work, attending evening classes, and building new relationships can make sustaining healthy daily sleep habits difficult.

When college students are constantly faced with daily stressors, being **deprived of sleep can influence your emotional, physical, and mental functioning**. Learning can be interrupted, as well as your memory, judgment, reactivity, energy, and mood.

Different sleep phases contribute to distinct physiological processes, which affect the body. As you go through your day, deep sleep allows an individual to sustain energy, maximizes the brain's ability to learn, and increases the capacity for new insight. Restful sleep also allows the body to defend itself from illness and infection through the release of hormones, and provides the heart and vascular system the ability to rest.

If you are concerned about how sleep might be affecting you, learn how to bring attention to ways to feel better and improve your sleep habits and health overall.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

PHYSICAL

- Low energy
- Increased food cravings
- Vulnerability to cold and influenza
- Fatigue
- Elevated blood pressure
- Higher risk of heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, diabetes, and stroke
- Decreased levels of testosterone interfering with sexual drive and interest
- Premature aging
- Forgetfulness
- Somatic complaints
- Weakened immune system
- Weight gain

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Difficulty concentration
- Reduced memory retention
- Decreased judgment
- Mood swings
- Compromised coping skills
- Impaired academic performance
- Difficulty concentrating or inability to focus
- Increased risk taking
- Disorganization
- Poor prioritization
- Focus on short-term rewards
- Disorientation, Hallucinations, and Paranoia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Impulsivity
- Suicidal thoughts

10 TIPS FOR GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

1. **Stick to the same bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends.** On the weekends try to limit your extra wake hours to two.
2. **Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual.** A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime conducted away from bright lights helps separate your sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress or anxiety, which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep or remain asleep.
3. **Avoid napping, especially in the afternoon.** A power nap may help you get through the day, but if you find that you can't fall asleep at bedtime, eliminating even short catnaps may help.
4. **Exercise regularly.**
5. **Create a sleep-conducive environment.** Dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.
6. **Sleep on comfortable mattress and pillows.**
7. **Use bright light to help manage your "circadian rhythms."** Expose yourself to sunlight in the morning and avoid bright light in the evening.
8. **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and heavy meals in the evening.**
9. **Wind down.** Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode, so spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity such as reading.
10. **If you are having trouble falling asleep after 20-30 minutes, go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired.** Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode, so spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity such as reading.

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/healthy-sleep-tips>

SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR SLEEP

Mental Health Services at the Colonial Health Center offers a number of services for students experiencing sleep related issues:

- **Individual counseling:** Students can see a counselor for brief therapy to work on issues related to sleep related symptoms; sessions usually occur on a weekly basis
- **Group counseling:** Students coping with life challenges related to sleep difficulties may wish to consider joining at group at MHS, which are free and unlimited to GW students
- **Learning skills and Self-Help Library:** Students can peruse pamphlets, books, podcasts, and videos on improving sleep habits as well as many other topics
- **Workshops** are offered throughout the year on various topics, including sleep hygiene; visit our website for information about upcoming workshops
- **Referrals** are available for therapists in the community, mental health agencies, and other campus and community resources
- **MHS's website** (healthcenter.gwu.edu) has up-to-date information on services offered by MHS, as well as links to related topics; also visit us on Facebook (facebook.com/GWHealthCenter) or Twitter ([@GWHealthCenter](https://twitter.com/GWHealthCenter))
- **Call-a-Counselor 24/7:** Students may contact MHS anytime, day or night, to speak to a counselor about their mental health concerns, including anxiety; (202) 994-5300



Mental Health Services at the Colonial Health Center offers workshops, an online self-help library, and other online resources as well as individual and group counseling. To access services, come in or call us at (202) 994-5300.