

Sleep and the College Student

College life is ready-made for the development of sleeping disorders. No one tells you when to go to bed or when to rise. Both academic work and the opportunity to have fun keep students up until all hours. Jobs, internships, and extra-curricular activities often leave the hours between 1:00 and 3:00 am the only time to talk to friends or go online.

Types of Insomnia

Most people need between eight and nine hours of sleep a night to wake refreshed. Everyone, however, has difficulty falling asleep occasionally. People think of Insomnia as just having trouble falling asleep. And that is certainly one kind of insomnia. In reality there are several types:

- waking too early and not being able to fall back asleep
- waking frequently during the night, and
- waking up at the right time but not feeling refreshed

These symptoms may last a few days (transient), up to three weeks (short-term), or become a chronic condition

If the symptoms of insomnia impact on a person's daytime functioning the symptoms should be discussed with a health care provider. Talk to a clinician in the Health Services or stop in at the Furman Counseling Center. There are many ways to treat sleep problems and one should never have to suffer in silence

Why Bother to Sleep?

So what's the big deal about sleep? Here are some consequences of prolonged sleep deprivation.

Sleep and cognition—recent research indicates that lack of sleep makes it more difficult for a person to solve problems, think abstractly, and think quickly.

Sleep and memory—Our brain is not inactive while sleeping. During sleep we consolidate what we have learned during the previous day and often continue solving problems. With insufficient sleep we have difficulty remembering what we read, said or saw the previous day.

Sleep and the immune system— Our immune system needs sleep in order to function at top efficiency. Especially during flu season, it is important to keep our immune system working to ward off that nasty flu.

Sleep and weight—Long term sleep deprivation may lead to weight gain, researchers say. Insulin is metabolized less efficiently and the stress hormone cortisol rises. Obesity researcher, George Blackburn of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, MA says "A good night's sleep is important to weight management".

Sleep and mood—We all recognize that lack of sleep makes us cranky, irritable, and quick to anger. But, did you know that long term sleep loss can contribute to or exacerbate depression? While too much sleep may be a symptom of depression, too little sleep may actually contribute to its onset.

Rather than thinking of sleep as a luxury, it is better to recognize it as a necessity that keeps us healthy, thinking clearly, and in good spirits

