

THE SILENT HEALTH CRISIS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Art Truitt, Carla Reddy, Odalis Marcial, Tiffany St. Clair, Sophia Pacelli

Addressing Sleep Deprivation in College Students

Academic and social pressures among college students are fueling an epidemic of sleep deprivation with lasting effects on health and future success.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

01/30/2025 - Are you sleeping, or are you just lying in bed? Let's be honest, we've all been there. We promise to go to bed at a reasonable hour, only to find ourselves scrolling through social media for hours instead.

In today's fast-paced world, the importance of quality sleep cannot be overstated. With the constant demands on our time and energy, prioritizing quality sleep is crucial for maintaining both our physical health and mental productivity. Quality sleep isn't just about the number of hours we get, but also about minimizing interruptions and maintaining consistency each night. As society becomes more aware of the profound impact sleep has on overall well-being, experts are encouraging us to adopt healthier sleep habits and routines.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

Sleep deprivation has been a widespread issue in the U.S. and is associated with an increased risk of cognitive impairment and dementia. Poor sleep is especially dangerous in combination with hypertension. High blood pressure increases the likelihood of stroke, which can lead to the early onset of dementia. Lack of sleep reverses the normal blood pressure profile, which can lead to masked hypertension later in life. A drop in blood pressure during sleep is essential for cardiovascular health because it allows our blood vessels to rest. Therefore, an abnormal sleep schedule can contribute to blood vessel damage and long-term cognitive decline.

Quality sleep is essential for college students because of their busy schedules. This population often experiences sleep deprivation due to some combination of school work, part-time jobs, or managing a social life. Alongside physical health, emotional well-being is also significantly influenced by sleep quality. Poor sleep negatively affects mental health, deteriorating academic performance, and the overall college experience. Lack of sleep can also cause an imbalance in emotional responses. Higher reactivity makes student more vulnerable to stress, which can lead to anxiety or depression. Stress also weakens the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to disease.

IMPLICATIONS

Current research highlights that chronic sleep deprivation significantly increases the risk of cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and dementia later in life. Lack of sleep also disrupts blood pressure regulation and emotional wellbeing. College students are particularly susceptible to poor sleep, as the college lifestyle often leads to late nights spent balancing coursework, social events, part-time jobs, and excessive screen time. Sleep deprivation is detrimental to health, academic performance, and the overall college experience. It is important to understand the effects of sleep on college students due to the significant short-term and long-term impacts. Based on these effects, programs can be implemented to promote healthy sleep habits, improving physical and mental well-being.

For example, universities across the nation are implementing a variety of strategies aimed at ensuring well-rested students. These initiatives include offering educational workshops on sleep and self-care, as well as promoting mental health resources to address issues like stress and anxiety. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy sleep practices such as:

- Establishing a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends
- Creating a relaxing bedtime routine
- Limiting screen time and/or stimulants such as coffee or nicotine before bed
- Ensuring a comfortable, dark, and quiet sleeping environment

By adopting these practices, students can better manage their sleep, leading to improved health. Prioritizing sleep now can set a strong foundation for long-term physical and mental health. So let's keep the promise to our future selves and go to bed at a reasonable hour tonight!

SOURCES

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. What are the health effects of sleep deprivation? NHLBI. Updated October 17, 2022. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep-deprivation/health-effects>
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. What are the health effects of sleep deprivation? NHLBI. Updated October 17, 2022. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep-deprivation/health-effects>
- Medic G, Wille M, Hemels MEH. Short- and long-term health consequences of sleep disruption. *Nat Sci Sleep*. 2017;9:151-161. doi:10.2147/NSS.S134864
- Cleveland Clinic. Sleep deprivation. Updated November 1, 2023. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23970-sleep-deprivation>
- Rea, E. M., DeCarlo Santiago, C., Nicholson, L., Heard Egbert, A., & Bohnert, A. M. (2023). Sleep, Affect, and Emotion Reactivity in First-Year College Students: A Daily Diary Study. *International journal of behavioral medicine*, 30(5), 753–768. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-022-10127-0>
- Yiallourou S, Baril AA, Wiedner C, et al. Short Sleep Duration and Hypertension: A Double Hit for the Brain. *Journal of the American Heart Association*. 2024/11/05 2024;13(21):e035132 . doi:10.1161/JAHA.124.035132 <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/JAHA.124.035132>