Poor Sleep May Lead to Worse Grades for College Students

Restless nights affect academic performance as much as binge drinking and smoking pot, study suggests.

Instead of staying up studying all night, college students might want to try a new way to improve their grades: get a good night’s sleep.

Researchers report that having trouble sleeping is as strong a predictor of falling grades as binge drinking or smoking marijuana. They noted that undergraduates who don’t sleep well are much more likely to have lower grades or withdraw from a class than other students who get enough sleep. “Well-rested students perform better academically and are healthier physically and psychologically,” study investigators Roxanne Prichard, an associate professor of psychology, and Monica Hartmann, a professor of economics, both at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., said in a news release from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

The investigators examined information collected on more than 43,000 college students in the Spring 2009 American College Health Association National College Health Assessment. Specifically, the researchers looked for factors that predicted academic problems among the students, such as lower GPA or failing grades.

Poor sleep had the same effect on students’ GPA as binge drinking and marijuana use, the study revealed. This link was most obvious among freshmen. The study authors said poor sleep alone helped predict whether or not these first-year students would drop out of a class.

Trouble sleeping was linked to worse academic performance even after other possible contributing factors -- such as depression, work hours, learning disabilities or chronic health issues -- were considered. However, the association between poor sleep and poor grades does not prove a cause-and-effect relationship.

New Study:

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that staying up late working or studying makes your body crave doughnuts, burgers, and pizza. Carrots and apples, not so much.

Why is that? At the University of California, Berkeley, Matthew Walker measured people’s food choices and imaged their brain activity after a night’s sleep and after a night with no sleep. He found people preferred junk food after the sleepless night, and their sleep-deprived brains showed less capacity to make good-for-you choices and more I-wanna choices.

“There’s a shift in the behavioral choices that people are making, and this seems to be co-occurring with those changes in brain activity.”

So if you get enough sleep, you may choose better and eat more healthfully.
Overcoming barriers to Exercise: No more excuses

You know you should be more active, but there are so many things that seem to get in the way. It’s time for some positive thinking. No more excuses! Here are some tips to help you overcome those barriers and improve your health. Finding time to exercise

Try exercising first thing in the morning before your day gets too busy. Combine physical activity with a task that’s already part of your day, such as walking the dog or doing household chores. If you don’t have 30 minutes to be active, look for three 10-minute periods.

Sticking with your exercise plan
Make exercise interesting and enjoyable. Do things you enjoy, but pick up the pace. Try new activities to keep your interest alive. If you can stick with it for at least 6 months, it’s a good sign that you’re on your way to making physical activity a regular habit.

Exercising without spending money
All you need for brisk walking is a pair of comfortable, non-slip shoes. For strength training, you can make your own weights using soup cans or water bottles. Check out work out times at the gym— it’s there for your use!

Practice a Well-balanced Exercise Program

Don’t focus on just one form of activity (HealthDay News) -- To get the full benefits of regular exercise, experts say you should focus on many forms of activity.

The Cleveland Clinic says a balanced exercise program should include:

- Strengthening exercises that repeatedly contract the muscles, improving strength, posture and wellness.
- Flexibility and stretching exercises that gradually develop the muscles and improve range of motion.

Increasing your energy
Regular, moderate physical activity can help reduce fatigue and even help you manage stress. Once you become active, you’re likely to have more energy than before. As you do more, you also may notice that you can do things more easily, faster, and for longer than before.

Aerobic exercises that strengthen the lungs and heart and boost the body’s use of oxygen.
Armpits, Belly Buttons and Chronic Wounds: The ABCs of Our Body Bacteria

Minutes after you were born, bacteria moved in. Since then, their populations have exploded, diversified and spread—on your skin and eyes and in your mouth and gut, not to mention other places. These bacterial cells now far outnumber your own cells.

Some bacteria on your skin can cause infections, like antibiotic-resistant infections known as MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus). Preventing such illnesses is the reason for those restroom signs about proper hand washing.

But most bacteria on your skin are harmless, and some are actually very helpful. They ward off more dangerous bacteria, aid wound healing and shelter us from certain skin infections. For instance, Staphylococcus epidermidis protects us by taking up space that a more harmful bacterium would otherwise occupy.

Understanding how and why bacteria colonize particular places on the body could point to ways of treating skin and other conditions.

Chronic Wounds and Bacteria

In the quest to better understand the skin’s bacterial communities, Elizabeth Grice studied bacteria on 20 different body parts during a research fellowship at the National Institutes of Health.

She learned that certain types of skin-dwelling bacteria thrive in warm, moist places like armpits and between toes. Others prefer wide, dry expanses like the backside.

She also discovered that each person’s collection of bacteria is unique—like fingerprints. But unlike your fingerprints, the bacterial communities can change depending on your diet, environment, health, age and many other factors.

Certain diseases, like diabetes, also affect the bacteria on your skin. A major complication of diabetes is sores, or ulcers, on the feet that never heal. Grice suspects that high blood sugar, which is known to change the skin’s structure, likely encourages a specific subset of bacteria to grow. And, after various research studies on mice, Grice concluded that the altered bacterial communities on diabetic mice prevent cuts from healing normally. She now hopes to find a way to manipulate the bacteria on the feet of people with diabetes to help ulcers heal.

Biodiversity project and now they are almost ready to publish their findings. The scientists expected that, in addition to each person’s special collection of bacteria, there would be a few common strains living on everyone. To their surprise, they could not find a single strain of bacteria common to all the volunteers. The researchers aren’t yet sure what to make of this discovery.

The belly button project is part of a broader effort called Your Wild Life that’s working to identify all the organisms on and in the human body as well as those in homes and neighborhoods. The project, which is based in North Carolina, is using crowd-sourcing techniques to collect samples from around the country. Current studies focus on bacteria, fungi and insects.

A future project will be “Armpit-pa-looza”—a study of the microbes in the armpits of humans and other primates. Bacteria in the armpit produce a distinctive odor that we recognize in ourselves and others near us. Many scientists believe that this odor can communicate not only who we are, but also if we have certain diseases. A better understanding of armpit bacteria could have a wide range of applications in health and hygiene.

After giving blood, you need to let your body recover.

The American Red Cross offers these suggestions:

Drink extra fluids, but don’t drink alcohol for 24 hours after the donation.

You can remove the bandage from your arm within a few hours of the donation.

Use soap and water to gently clean the area around the injection site.

If the site starts to bleed, apply pressure and hold your arm straight up for 10 minutes, or until bleeding subsides.

The remainder of donation day, avoid heavy exercise or lifting heavy objects.

Don’t do anything that makes you feel light-headed or dizzy.
Young men, on the other hand, had more crashes at night, more off-road crashes and were more likely to have crashes on weekends, according to the study published recently in the Journal of Safety Research.

“There are often different risk factors for young male and young female drivers because their behavior and attitudes are generally different,” lead researcher Sunanda Dissanayake, a civil engineering professor at Kansas State University, said in a university news release. “This may help explain why one gender is more likely to be involved in a certain type of crash. For example, young males may have more off-road crashes because this crash type is more frequently involved with speeding on rural roads -- a driving habit exhibited more by young males than young females,” she added.

The findings could be used to develop educational materials specifically targeted at either young male or young female drivers, the researchers added.

The types of vehicle crashes involving young drivers often vary by gender, a new study has found.

Researchers analyzed data from 2007 to 2011 for all crashes involving drivers between the ages of 16 and 24 in Kansas and found a number of differences between male and female drivers.

Young women were 66 percent more likely to wear a seat belt, 28 percent more likely to drive on a restricted license and they had more crashes at intersections and with pedestrians. They were also more likely to have crashes on weekdays.

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