

Sleepy students emphasize studies, social activity to detriment of health, according to study

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College students are typically more sleep deprived than the rest of us and often ignore the health benefits of adequate slumber, said a University of Alabama researcher who studies the topic.

Dr. Adam Knowlden, assistant professor in UA's department of [health science](#), recently surveyed college students about their [sleep](#) behaviors and attitudes. He co-authored an article that will publish in a forthcoming issue of *Family & Community Health*.

"The [health benefits](#) of sleep did not factor into students' decisions about whether or not to get [adequate sleep](#)," said Knowlden of the students in the study. "This might suggest the students offset sleep when faced with other activities they deem more important, such as academic coursework or social activities."

Students in the study cited job stress and a lack of time as the two greatest factors that prevented them from getting enough sleep.

"About 33 percent of the general population receives insufficient sleep versus about 60 percent of the college population," Knowlden said. "One of the main differences is that college students' ability to get sufficient sleep is more within their control, whereas the general adult population is more likely to be dealing with medical [sleep disorders](#)."

In the study, Knowlden and his co-author, Dr. Manoj Sharma, a researcher formerly in the health promotion and education program at the University of Cincinnati, recruited 188 University of Cincinnati college students for the study that began in the spring of 2012. Students in the study were employed undergraduates who operated motor vehicles and who were not diagnosed with sleep disorders.

Other findings of the study included:

- Students were more concerned about inadequate sleep hindering their abilities to manage stress and concentrate at work than they were its impact on their long-term health.
- Students cited having nighttime environments conducive to sleep, reducing mental and physical stress and maintaining a consistent sleep schedule as factors they believed most important in ensuring sufficient sleep.

Compared to the general population, [college students](#) have different factors that can interfere with their sleeping patterns, the UA researcher said.

"Students may be experiencing a new level of independence and can struggle to find the balance between juggling classes, finances, social lives, athletics, volunteer work, parental expectations and employment.

"While most students see sleep in a positive light, most are unaware of practices that can improve their sleep," Knowlden said. "Learning how to manage time and finances, for example, are two key ways to help students reduce stress."

The good news, Knowlden said, is that students' perceptions of the benefits of sleep can be changed.

"Students can achieve good sleep and still maximize their educational opportunities."

Obtaining sufficient sleep – seven to eight hours a day – is important for all, Knowlden said.

"Sleep is extremely important to overall health," Knowlden said. "Poor sleep has short-term consequences on mood, concentration, higher learning and can lead to the dangers involved in drowsy driving. It also has long-term ramifications on our overall health. Research has found links between poor sleep and diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity."

Provided by University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa

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