

Sleep

Getting a healthy amount of sleep and feeling well rested is incredibly important to how well we function as we navigate each day. For college students, getting adequate sleep is of the utmost importance as it influences short- and long-term health, the ability to learn, process and recall information, and the ability to manage stress.

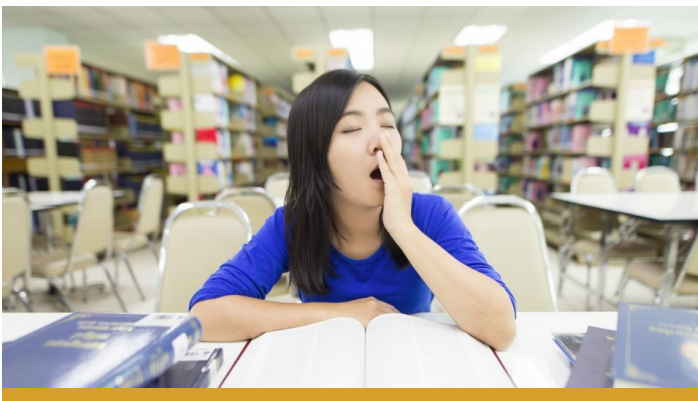
How much sleep do I need?

According to the CDC, adults between the ages of 18 and 60 need approximately seven or more hours of sleep each night. Sleep quality is also important as poor sleep quality can cause one to not feel rested, even if they did get an appropriate number of hours of sleep.

Insufficient sleep can cause a number of short-term and long-term issues. In the short-term, insufficient sleep can cause issues with learning, processing, and recalling information. It can also make it more difficult to make decisions and manage difficult emotions such as stress or anxiety. In the long-term, insufficient sleep can increase one's risk for a number of chronic health problems such as cardiovascular disease and depression.

If you experience issues getting adequate sleep, you are not alone. Survey responses from Anoka Technical College students in 2020 indicated that almost **80% of students get adequate sleep only three nights or fewer each week and 0% of students get adequate sleep six or seven nights per week.**

These findings highlight the fact that getting good sleep is not always easy. However, there are a number of strategies that may help in shifting sleep habits in a healthier direction.



Tips for Better Sleep

- **Create a sleep routine.** Create a schedule for yourself that includes a wind-down routine (see below), a bedtime, and a wake-up time. Do your best to stick with the same bedtime and wake-up times even on week-
- ends or days without pressing responsibilities. Our bodies have a difficult time adjusting to vastly different sleep patterns, so sticking with a plan and getting in a routine will likely make falling asleep and waking up at your planned time much easier.
- **Create a wind-down routine.** Develop a routine that you do each night prior to bedtime. Ideally, the routine would include ending use of all screen time for the night, acts of self-care (putting on pajamas, washing face, brushing teeth, etc.) and one relaxing activity. Relaxing activities could include reading a book, listening to calm music, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or light stretching. Creating a calm environment and dimming the lights during your bedtime routine may also help. This routine can be short or more extended if needed. Those who struggle to fall asleep may benefit from a more extended routine that includes a relaxation exercise.
- **Avoid screens for at least 30 minutes prior to bedtime.** This suggestion can be challenging as scrolling on a phone or watching TV is how many people choose to relax in the evening. However, exposure to screens can be very stimulating and can negatively impact our ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Consider setting an alarm on your phone as a reminder to turn off screens or download a bedtime app that provides a similar reminder. If you need to use your phone prior to bed, use the night mode if available (a setting that changes the light from the screen to a warmer color) and dim the light to its lowest setting.
- **Minimize distractions.** Avoid engaging in activities prior to your scheduled bedtime that may cause you to avoid going to bed. Silence your electronics prior to bedtime and consider using white noise or ear plugs if outside sounds have the potential to wake you.
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol.** Caffeine can stay in your system five to seven hours after consumption, so consider your planned bedtime before consuming. Alcohol use, even as little as one or two drinks, is linked with decreased sleep quality and duration.
- **Avoid eating large meals before bedtime.** Try to eat earlier in the evening or choose a lighter portion.

- **Use your bed for sleep.** It can be challenging if space is limited in your home, but do your best to only use your bed for sleep. Our bodies and minds develop associations to places and you want your body and mind to think “sleep” the moment you lay down in bed. Those who use their beds as a place to do schoolwork, socialize, or play video games will not benefit from this body/mind connection.

What to Do When You Can't Fall Asleep

Experiencing difficulties falling asleep on occasion is common. Some of the following tips may help when faced with this challenge. If you experience difficulties falling asleep on a regular basis, you are encouraged to talk with a mental health or medical professional for support and guidance.

- **Plan ahead.** If you know you are feeling overwhelmed, take a moment to journal or create a to-do list before starting your bedtime routine. Getting your thoughts, plans, or worries down on paper can help us from ruminating on them while lying in bed.
- **Change your environment.** If needed, make changes to your environment that are keeping you from sleep. Adjust the heat/air-conditioning, block out light from windows, or play some white noise.
- **Refocus your mind.** Do you know the old saying that you should “count sheep” in order to fall asleep? The idea is to think of something neutral to keep yourself from worrying, planning, or replaying stressful experiences. Consider playing the alphabet game by choosing a category (names, movies, etc.) and identifying one item from the category for each letter of the alphabet. If your mind starts to wander to something stressful, gently refocus back.
- **Get up after 20 minutes.** If you have been trying to fall asleep for 20 minutes or longer and aren't feeling sleepy, get up and do something calming in dim light. This can help to avoid feelings of frustration that can occur when we struggle to fall asleep.
- **Try deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.** Practice slowly breathing in and out to the count of ten while feeling your abdomen gently rise and fall with each breath. If a visual is helpful to refocus your mind, think about each breath being the rise and fall of a wave on a beach. To practice progressive muscle relaxation, contract one muscle group at a time while inhaling and hold the tension for five to ten seconds. Then release the tension. Start with the feet, move to your calves, upper legs, buttocks, back, chest, neck, face, shoulders, arms, and hands. Return to any areas of tension.

Additional Resources

There are many resources available on sleep and related topics. Check out the following resources available online.

- What to Do When You Can't Sleep
 - <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/what-to-do-when-you-cant-sleep/>
- Health Sleep Habits
 - <https://sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits/>
- Health Sleep Videos
 - <https://sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-resource-videos/>
- What Are Sleep Deprivation and Deficiency?
 - <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep-deprivation>
- Overcoming Sleep Problems Caused by a Non-traditional Work Schedule
 - <https://www.uclahealth.org/medical-services/sleep-disorders/patient-resources/patient-education/coping-with-shift-work>

Seeking Help & Support

If you are experiencing issues with sleep or want to create a healthier sleep routine, you are encouraged to reach out for support.

As an Anoka Technical College student, a great place to start is with a college counselor. Counseling services are available to students at no charge. See the box title “Counseling Services” for additional details.

For self-help resources, check out the information linked the “Additional Resources” Section.

Counseling Services

Counseling services are available to support Anoka Technical College students. A counselor can talk with you about any concerns or difficulties you are facing, provide support, and help in developing strategies and skills to promote wellness and goal achievement. Counseling services are confidential and free. You are encouraged to reach out for support.

To learn more about counseling services, visit: <https://www.anokatech.edu/student-services/counseling-services/>

To schedule an appointment with a counselor, visit the weblink above or call 763-576-7860.