

Foster Care to Good Health

Sleep

*Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing
Beloved from pole to pole!*

That's from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and just maybe you had to read it in English class once. It's true, though, isn't it? "Sleep it is a gentle thing ... beloved from pole to pole." And for darn sure most of us don't get enough of it.

According to a 2002 study, only 11% of students interviewed said they were getting a good night's sleep. Often, this is due to a cycle set in motion when they start to go to bed later and later, eventually resetting their biological clocks and making it impossible to get to sleep until 3:00 or even 4:00 in the morning.

Lack of sleep has serious consequences –

<i>Loss of ability to ...</i>	<i>Increased...</i>
Concentrate	Irritability
Remember things	Depression
Think critically	Anxiety
Perform mechanical tasks quickly or accurately	Stress

Most adults need between seven and eight hours of sleep a night in order to feel their best the next day. Here are some tips to help you maintain what is called good "sleep hygiene."

- Go to bed and get up at approximately the same time every day
- Get regular exercise, but not just before bed – try to exercise in the morning or afternoon rather than evening.
- Relax your mind before going to bed, by reading or meditating or watching television
- Avoid caffeine after around 3:00 in the afternoon
- If you nap during the day, make it a "power nap" of no longer than 20 minutes or so. Any more than that will leave you groggy and heavy-headed with that unpleasant taste in your mouth, and you will be less likely to fall asleep at night.
- Keep your bedroom dark and cool. If you tend to be cold in bed, wear socks! If it's ever REALLY cold, remember Scrooge in his nightcap and wear a woolen hat to bed.

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If you lie in bed for more than 20 minutes or half an hour without falling asleep, there are two schools of thought on what to do. Naturally, they are diametrically opposed to each other! What can we say? Try them both, and use the one that works for you.

You can get out of bed and read a book or watch some (non-excitabile) television until you are sleepy. We've been told text books are particularly good at putting students to sleep...

The other school of thought says getting up and doing anything keeps your mind too active to sleep. School of Thought #2 suggests lying on your back and taking long deep breaths, counting backwards from 100 with each breath and consciously letting go of your tensions. Concentrate on relaxing your body and slowing your breath. This is actually the old counting sheep method, just without any sheep.

Finally, sometimes students get into the habit of taking strong coffee, No Doz, Red Bull or other stimulants to stay awake when they need to study or work late. A cup of coffee contains between 110 and 150 mg of caffeine, Red Bull contains 80 mg (along with 1000 mg of the amino acid taurine, which is said to contribute to the stimulant effect of caffeine), and one No Doz tablet contains 200 mg of caffeine. A caffeine level of 250-750 mg can cause restlessness, nausea, headaches, muscle tension, an irregular heartbeat and – you guessed it – sleep disturbance. Levels above 750 mg (say, five cups of coffee or four No Doz tablets) can cause anxiety attacks, ringing in the ears and even delirium. Similar effects are felt during the “let-down” from a caffeine high. Surely, a much better method is to manage your time well enough that you don't *have* to stay awake studying until the wee hours of the morning...