



6 Top Sleep Tips for College Students

College students are notoriously sleep deprived. Research shows that a huge 70% of college students get less than the recommended 8 hours of sleep per night and that the United States has the sleepest students in the world. Sleep has been shown to be a major factor in determining your grades. When you consider how much your college grades affect your future career, you begin to realize just how important sleep is during this critical time. But it's not exactly like we choose to be sleep deprived. Getting good sleep as a teenager is difficult. Getting good sleep when you're a college student is even worse. Having gone through college myself, first with chronic insomnia but then finally being able sleep well, here are my top 6 sleep tips for college students.

- **Avoid Late Night Alcohol:** Some people think that alcohol will help them sleep and some deliberately have it before bed as a sleep aid. But whilst it's true that it often helps send you to sleep, it reduces the quality of your sleep. This means you'll feel sleepy in the morning even if you had the recommended 8 hours sleep. But it also increases your chances of waking up during the night and be unable to fall back to sleep. If you're a regular drinker, try to cut back on alcohol during the week and see how it affects your sleep. It's best to avoid it completely on nights when sleep is extra important such as before an exam.
- **Beware of Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome:** Delayed sleep phase syndrome (known as DSPS for short) is when the timing of your sleep is delayed by a little each night. This means the time you fall asleep at night becomes later, and it often means the time you wake up becomes later to compensate. Before long you've got a sleep schedule where you fall asleep in the early hours and wake up just before noon. Sounds familiar? Younger people are most likely to get DSPS. The biology of teenagers is such that their body clock is programmed to stay awake that little bit longer into the night than everyone else. All things being equal, there's nothing actually wrong with DSPS, but it does become a big problem if you've got morning classes to attend. The further your sleep schedule shifts, the worse the problem becomes.

To avoid DSPS you need to have a rock solid sleep schedule. The two most important things to do are:

1. Wake up at the same time each day – Then listen to your body to decide when you need to fall asleep at night.
2. Expose yourself to sunlight during the day and avoid bright lights during the night – This will help keep your body clock in check.

- **Take Advantage of the Exercise Facilities:** Exercise is a natural healthy way to boost your sleep drive making it easier to fall asleep at night. Research continually shows that those who regularly exercise get better sleep over those who don't. Exercise also boosts your immune system, is an excellent de-stresser, and increases blood flow to the brain making you smarter. The benefits of exercise are huge. Colleges often have exercise facilities on site. You don't need to hit the gym. Take a look what's on offer and sign up to a few classes and see what fits your interests.

The best time to exercise is in the morning. Try and avoid too much exercise in the morning. But any exercise is better than nothing, even if it's just a 10 minute evening walk.

- **Take a Post-Lunch Nap to Make Up for Lost Sleep:** Let's be realistic. There's going to be times when you just don't get enough sleep. Whether it be because you're pulling an all nighter to hit a deadline, stressing out over exams, or attending to essential late night socializing. Short 20 minute power naps have been shown to boost concentration and increase alertness. It's starting to become common for employers to encourage workers to take naps on breaks, especially shift workers or airline pilots. It's not going to replace sleep, but short 20 minute naps are great for a quick boost. Unlike coffee or energy drinks, they won't affect your sleep the next night. The best time to have a nap is mid afternoon before lunch when there's a natural dip in alertness. Avoid napping too close to bed time. Sleep for no more than 20 minutes unless you plan to take a regular nap at the same time each day, in which case increase the time to around 1 hour 20 minutes to avoid having to wake up when you're in deep sleep.
- **Don't Study for an Exam the Night Before:** Studies shows that those who sacrifice sleep to study get worse grades than those who decide instead to get some sleep. More sleep is linked to better grades much more than time spent studying. Sleep is an important part of the learning process. Without sleep, learning is only temporary. When you fall asleep, information is transferred from short term memory to long term memory. It also helps us make sense of new information. The brain compares new information to the vast array of information stored in the subconscious mind to look for patterns. This helps us make sense of difficult problems and gives rise to the phrase "sleep on it". Maintain a good sleep schedule leading up to the exam. The night before, have a relaxing evening free from studying and get lots of rest.
- **Prioritize Sleep:** Think of sleep as an ally to help you get better grades rather than the enemy who saps your alertness. Nothing can replace the benefits sleep provides. It certainly can't be replaced with energy drinks, which US Army research has recently shown actually make you feel sleepier in the long term. Among the many benefits of sleep it makes you smarter, more productive and has been shown to boost grades. So make time for sleep and relaxation. Unless you can afford to take a few days away from your studies, make sure nothing infringes on your sleep time. Good sleep will make your college days more stress free, you'll feel happier, and you'll leave with a better grade.