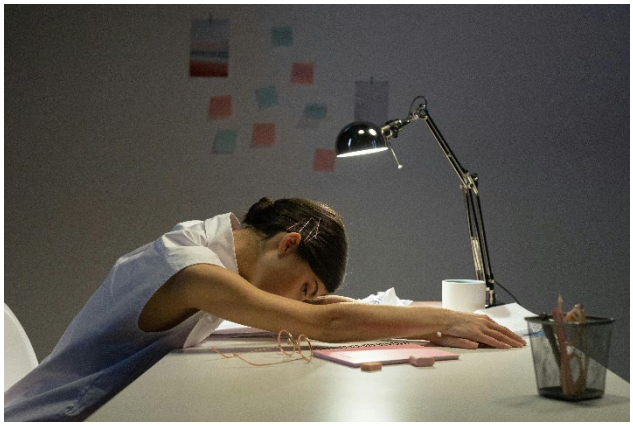
Opinion: Stop Sleeping on Sleep

By Spencer DuMontier

Nearly every animal on this planet sleeps. Because of our busy, work-filled lives, however, sleep has decreased drastically on people's list of priorities. In light of alarming statistics like "32.8 percent of adults report getting less sleep than recommended," and "nearly 10 percent of people have chronic insomnia," everyone needs to start thinking about the effects of lack of sleep and how to change lifestyles to put more emphasis on protecting it.

Roughly a third of a person's life is spent sleeping. Given the years or even decades we spend sleeping, it's logical to conclude that the quality – or lack – of sleep significantly affects our lives, and science bears that out. Sleep is important not only for mental health and wellbeing, but also physical health.

Over time, poor sleep can reduce lifespans. But in a recent poll by *The Acta Diurna*, 23 percent of Altamont respondents reported that they don't believe sleep is key. One student wrote, "I believe that sleep is not as crucial to one's health and wellbeing as people make it seem. During your lack of sleep, you thrive [on] adrenaline rushes, and in my opinion, when I actually get enough sleep, I feel sleepier than I actually would have if I [had] slept bad[ly]."



Although noticing one's own "real" level of fatigue once you get some rest and the adrenaline wears off is a common and easily explained phenomenon, other respondents had similar views. The truth, however, is that getting sleep is a crucial component of our overall health. A lack of sleep makes you far more susceptible to several chronic diseases, obesity, and even early death.

An article from Stanford University says, "Carolyn Walworth, 17, often reaches a breaking point around 11 p.m., when she collapses in tears. For 10 minutes or so, she just sits at her desk and cries, overwhelmed by unrelenting school demands. She is desperately tired and longs for sleep. But she knows she must move through it, because more assignments in physics, calculus, or French await her. She finally crawls into bed around midnight or 12:30 a.m. … The next morning, she fights to stay awake in her first-period U.S. history class, which begins at 8:15." This typical routine shows an alarming reality: a lack of sleep does not just make someone a little more grumpy or irritable, but can destroy mental health *and* academic performance, to say nothing about increased risk of car and other types of accidents.

So many aspects of modern society seem aligned against people getting a good night's sleep. In "Why Sleep Matters: Benefits of Sleep," researchers say, "When we miss sleep in order to keep

up with our 24-7 world, we pay a price with our ability to learn, our health and safety, and our quality of life."

Lack of sleep might be a choice, but for many, it is hard to avoid because of academic, athletic, or other school demands. As Altamont eighth grader James Rumbley says, "Teenagers biologically need more sleep and get tired later [in the day or night]. This means that early wakeup times are detrimental to teenagers' health. This is why I think we should have later start times [for school], maybe around nine, [as we do now] on Wednesdays, compensated by school going later [in the day]."

Another detriment to sleep is caffeine consumption. At Altamont, according to the poll, 50 percent of respondents use caffeine occasionally, with 10 percent regularly consuming it. While caffeine may be great at keeping people awake and alert throughout the day, it can also have extremely negative effects on sleep.

Technology can also have a major impact on sleep. One poll respondent wrote, "People watch TikTok and short form videos too much before they sleep which can impact their sleep quality and [cause them to] stay up late watching it." 68 percent of teens use their phones during evening hours, but blue light from devices makes the brain believe it's daytime and halts the production of the sleep hormone Melatonin, causing people to not feel sleepy and stay awake longer. This sleep disturbance causes a person's circadian rhythms, the body's natural sleep-wake cycle, to be dramatically disrupted.

Sleep is not a waste of time; it's something critical for a person's well-being. Sleep is crucial to human functioning and thriving. In a world where everything tries to grab a person's attention, rob one of free time, and sacrifice rest, it's easy to fall behind on sleep. It's important to remember, though, that sleep should be a priority. Whether that means putting down the phone before bed, limiting caffeine, making sure to go to bed a little earlier, a combination of those, or something else entirely, minor changes can majorly affect the way someone feels and lives. It's time, as a society, to put more effort into protecting sleep. Sleep not only makes people feel better the next day but leads to a happier and healthier *life.*