



Sleep: An Essential Ingredient to Success

ARIZONA

Hi Wildcats,

A few seasons ago, our men's basketball team played in a game that went into two overtimes. Because it was a night game, it didn't end until 1AM in the morning. What the average fan, shoot, even the super fan, doesn't know is that the student-athletes had another hour of post-game treatment that resulted in them not leaving McKale until 2AM. The following

morning, as I was walking to my office to begin my day, I ran into two of our basketball players already leaving the gym. When I asked them if they were headed back to bed, they gave me a quizzical look and said "No, we have to go to class." In other words, they worked the night before well past when most people go to bed, AND they woke up in the morning to work out before most people's days had even begun. If you think this is impressive (which I do), have a conversation with our swimmers and ask them what time their morning practices are. Or, ask one of our soccer players what time they have fitness. Name any sport and you can be sure our student-athletes are working hard. This is why I recommend to my friends and colleagues to hire student-athletes. You can teach anyone the nuances of the job, but you cannot teach the effort and work ethic that our student-athletes put forth on a daily basis.



Normal college life is filled with erratic schedules. When you add the demands and time commitment needed to be a student-athlete, it is downright chaotic. By pushing your bodies and minds to the limit, it is important to note what you are sacrificing. Unfortunately, one of the most common sacrifices I hear from our student-athletes also happens to be

one of the most important: SLEEP. Sometimes, it's intentional (i.e., "I have a final tomorrow so I am going to pull an 'all-nighter'"). However, many athletes forgo sleep unintentionally (i.e., "I go to bed but my mind is racing about so many things, I can't fall asleep"). The phrase "falling asleep" is very common and completely

inaccurate. A better way to think about the transition between being awake and entering sleep is the "process of leaving conscious thought behind."

Think about it – the reason many people struggle with sleep is because of the hectic days I noted in the previous paragraph. With such a busy schedule, when are you supposed to think about the next day or some issue that is going on in your life? Because as a student-athlete you are bombarded with things to do throughout the day, the only time when you

(continued on next page)



experience quiet is when you are lying in bed trying to induce sleep. Unfortunately, many of you will unintentionally use this calm time not to induce sleep but to process a laundry list of tasks for the next day (i.e., practice, papers, tests, social event, etc.) or something that happened to you earlier that you just didn't get the time to figure out (i.e., coach said something to you in training, your partner and you got into a fight, your mom mentioned something that is going on at home, etc.). One of the best ways to solve this dilemma is to set up a meeting with me. It is amazing how dedicating a 45-minute session discussing what is on your mind helps free up the rest of your week so you can focus on the task at hand including transitioning to sleep at night.

Now, let's talk about the importance of sleep.

A typical adult need seven to nine hours of sleep each night to be fully rested and functional. Most people underestimate the effect insufficient sleep can have on them.

An experiment conducted at the University of Pennsylvania showed that people who slept for six hours or less per night for two weeks were as impaired as someone who had been awake for 48 consecutive hours. Furthermore, the subjects were not aware of being this impaired. Yet throughout the two weeks of the experiment, the subjects had consistently lower cognitive abilities and

slower reaction times. So, without your awareness, lack of sleep will slow down your reaction time, hindering your performance in a way that can be costly in a competitive situation.

Researchers have found that another consequence of insufficient sleep is the release of hormones that lead to increased appetite. They make you feel as if you aren't full after meals, and this can lead to weight gain. This can be problematic if you need to meet, maintain, or reach a certain weight by your sport season. Luckily, the researchers also found that if you are able to sleep for 10 hours on consecutive nights, your hormones will return to nearly normal levels. The study also found that hunger and appetite levels will decrease by 25%. Still, nothing is a substitute for getting enough sleep every night.

Some benefits of getting extra sleep for long periods of time include improved athletic performance, alertness, and mood. For example: it was discovered that football players sprint time in the 40 yard dash decreased by a tenth of a second when they were fully rested. Players also reported lower levels of daytime sleepiness and fatigue. Furthermore, increased amounts of sleep correlates with increased levels of vigor even at the end of the season – a time which can be associated with exhaustion and fatigue.



BEAR DOWN



Here are some tips for getting enough sleep:

- 1 Make sleep a part of your normal training routine, just like working out and practice.
- 2 For several weeks before a competition, extend the amount of sleep you are getting. This way, if you are not able to get at least seven hours a night for the days immediately preceding the competition due to anxiety or extra-training, you have some hours stored in your “sleep bank,” which will help minimize the effects of not getting sufficient sleep.
- 3 Try to sleep for 7 to 9 hours as often as possible so that you do not fall behind on sleeping and require long nights to make up sleep deficits.
- 4 Keep a regular sleep schedule. That is, wake up and go to bed at the same time as often as possible to help your body maintain a normal sleep rhythm.
- 5 If you get the chance, take naps during the day, especially if you are feeling tired. Fifteen minute power naps are especially effective because they are short and leave you feeling refreshed and focused. However, a nap longer than 15 minutes can interfere when trying to go to sleep that night.
- 6 Schedule time to reflect on “issues” or problems in your life and resolve them during waking hours. This way they will be less likely to interfere with inducing sleep because you will not have these issues weighing on your mind.



If there are particular issues that are making you anxious and interfering with your sleep or if you just want to talk and see how you can improve your performance, I would highly recommend scheduling an appointment with me to help you reach your potential.

Please contact the medical assistant at **621-8805** or ask your athletic trainer to schedule an appointment. I look forward to working with you.

Best Wishes,
Scott Goldman, Ph.D.
*Sport and Clinical Psychologist
for Student-Athletes*