

Sleep...to Reach the Top of Your Game!

You've heard that good nutrition, training, and hydration enhance how we *feel* and how we *perform* whether that's in school, on the field, or while gaming. But, what's missing? *Hint*: Everyone does it, but doing it *well* is something many of us have trouble with.

Answer: Sleep!

What's so magical about sleep? Well, it literally affects how you feel, what you remember, food choices you make, and how you interact with others throughout the whole day. Here's how sleep factors into your life...and not just first thing in the morning and when you are tired and ready for bed.

BEFORE SCHOOL

Sleep helps your brain to function at its best. One of the first things to go when you don't get enough sleep is that sharp connection between your brain and your body. Picture your most well-rested day. You are able to focus, words come easily to you, you can problem solve, remember what you learned, and much, much more. Wake up tired? You feel fuzzy and know how hard it is going to be to concentrate in class or do well on your test, feel at your best when playing a game, and certainly not get your all-time high score!

DURING SCHOOL

Research shows a relationship between doing well academically and sleeping longer. The reverse is also true. Adding more hours awake can affect your ability to think straight. (Did you know that studies have found that those who stay awake for 17 hours function similarly to those with a blood alcohol level of 0.05%?!) A statistic on your side, though, is that the amount of sleep you get right before an exam doesn't translate directly to test performance. Instead, it is an average of longer sleep duration and better quality sleep over the month leading up to the exam that makes a difference.

AFTER SCHOOL

Screen time during school can not always be helped, but the time you spend on your computer, TV, and cell phone at home can. You know that blue-light reflecting back at you from your computer or cell phone? It can delay melatonin (a key sleep regulation hormone) release and make it harder to fall asleep once you're ready for bed. Controlling your light and blue-light exposure at home can help combat this. Look at your phone outside of your room on the couch or at your bedroom desk. Then try turning the lamp and cell phone lights off at the same time and then going to bed.

BEDTIME

Saving your bed for sleep only will help your brain recognize it is time for bed when you lie down. Watch how long you stay up playing video games or watching netflix and give yourself a period of time between watching a screen and going to bed.

EVER THOUGHT ABOUT HOW YOUR WAKING HOURS ADD UP?

Say you spend:

1 hour to get to school + 6.5 hours at school + 2 hours of sports practice + 2 hours for homework + 1 hours for dinner + 2 hours watching tv, catching up on social media, texting with friends, or gaming = *14.5 hours awake* during the day

Two and a half more hours and you are in that 17 hour zone where you don't want to be!

SLEEP AND SCREEN FAST FACTS

Video Games: Studies have shown that playing video games right before bed for a prolonged time can result in difficulty communicating clearly and finding the right words the next morning. Similarly, those who play less video games right before bed wake up more alert and less sleepy than those who play more. Gaming longer than 60 minutes a day also increases the amount of time it takes to fall asleep. On average, those who are playing games 2+ hours before bed have less restful sleep and over a shorter period of time.

TIP: *Lower the volume.* High volume can actually increase fatigue and insomnia before bedtime and increase alertness.

Social media: The good news? There is no direct link between social media usage and insufficient sleep. However, other factors are at play. For instance, anxiety and depression can lead to higher rates of non-restful sleep and these can be exacerbated through social media.

TIP: *Keep your phone out of your room.* Yes this is a hard one, but resisting the urge to look at the blue-light background can aid in a better night's sleep.

Athletics: You know how longer sleep duration, better sleep quality, and greater sleep consistency all count towards better academic performance? The same can be said for athletic performance. Think about how much better you can make a split-second decision of what to do on the field and how much stronger you feel when you have had enough sleep. Not to mention potentially getting sick and injured less often.

TIP: *Play to your schedule.* If you have practices every week, games coming up, and have a quiz to study for every week, make sure to always look at the big picture and average out that sleep.