



# The sleep substitute

Students struggle to find balance between sleep and getting everything done. Many substitute energy drinks, coffee and soda for sleep, despite negative health effects

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Five to eight cans of caffeinated soda and three to five hours of sleep make up an average day for senior Rachel Cook.

For many Truman students such as Cook, a good night's sleep is rare, and they turn to caffeine and naps for help.

## The necessity of sleep

Dr. Angie Randazzo, a behavioral sleep medicine specialist at St. Luke's Hospital Sleep Medicine and Research Center in St. Louis, said being sleep-deprived means an individual is getting at least two hours less than the amount of sleep needed. Randazzo said college students should try to obtain nine hours of sleep a night, so getting anything fewer than seven will cause sleep-deprivation.

"People will say 'I can get by on 'blank,'" and the problem is that getting by is not the same thing as functioning well," Randazzo said. "When people are in college, this is your time to really find where your skills are and really absorb as much as you can educationally, socially, everything. If you are sleep deprived, you are not able to really appreciate your education experience or even your social experience. You are depriving yourself, so making sleep a priority is critical."

Randazzo said sleep deprivation can cause impaired response times, poor memory and poorer recall and concentration in addition to physical symptoms such as fatigue and drowsiness.

For college students, the internal clock tends to shift to a later time, so it becomes more difficult for them to fall asleep earlier,

which pushes the bedtime and wake time later, Randazzo said. In addition, social activities and studying interfere with a person's ability to maintain a somewhat earlier schedule, she said.

For some students seven hours of sleep a night, although still considered within the sleep deprivation range, is uncommon and unachievable because of responsibilities, Cook said. She said she often "pulls all-nighters" to finish her work.

"My attitude towards sleep is that sleep is for the lucky or the weak and I am neither of those two things," Cook said.

She said a lack of sleep is nothing new for her. Since arriving at Truman State, she has maintained a relatively sleep-deprived schedule because of the amount she is working to achieve her goal of working for women's rights in the Middle East.

"I get mommied a lot," Cook said. "I have to deal with a lot of people feeling like it's their job to tell me I need to sleep. Telling me I need more sleep is like poking a bear. The bear is gonna get pissy and growl at you."

One of Cook's favorite nap locations is the library, a common nap spot for many students, Library Circulation Assistant Leslie Motter said. Motter said she often sees students asleep throughout the library, often with books and homework sprawled around them.

"We see so many asleep that it's not a strange thing," she said. "If [students] have a couple hours between classes, people aren't gonna be walking over them [at the library]. They can find a corner or a nook and just take a nap for a while. It's a good place to take a nap. Even I've done so during some of my breaks."

To stay awake, Cook said she has turned to caffeine and short naps, drinking five to eight sodas a day during high stress times such as finals week.

## Getting that caffeine buzz

Junior Chris Venable is another caffeine consumer, drinking coffee each morning and sodas throughout the week. However, Venable doesn't just drink coffee and caffeinated sodas for the energy. Venable said the taste of coffee and energy drinks is another reason he drinks them so frequently.

"I've had some of the other energy drinks like 5-Hour energy," Venable said. "I drank it and it tastes gross. It doesn't seem fair to me that you shouldn't be able to enjoy waking up in the morning. I like the taste of caffeinated beverages. Even if I woke up and wasn't tired and didn't need the energy

for it, I would drink coffee or soda because I like the taste."

Psychology professor Fred Shaffer teaches psychopharmacology during the summer, in which students learn the effects of drugs and substances on the body and mind. Shaffer, a coffee drinker, said a single cup of coffee has the potential to increase alertness and speed up the ability to process information if the consumer's body hasn't become overly tolerant to the effects of caffeine.

"You can become tolerant to caffeine's effects and you no longer benefit," Shaffer said. "But if a student has not become physically dependent on the caffeine, one cup can very well get a student through a 90-minute class."

Shaffer also said 80 percent of adults in the United States consume caffeine.

## The health risks

Brian Snyder, health and exercise science professor, said that while some students and faculty depend on caffeine for a convenient way to wake up, the effects of the sugar in the caffeinated beverages can produce negative nutritional effects.

"From an overall health perspective, energy balance is a major effect in weight gain," Snyder said. "You have to be aware that caffeinated beverages also have sugar and other effects. Black coffee has virtually no calories, but the sugar and cream that you add to it have a lot."

Venable has his own reasons to drink caffeinated beverages, but the effects, whether positive or negative, remain present.

"Caffeine is a pleasurable drug," Shaffer said. "It's a drug that does, in lower doses, make us feel more alert, energetic and gives us a positive mood. When you cross that point, however, you see side-effects like impaired muscle coordination and timing."

While caffeine can be detrimental to an individual hoping to get some sleep, Randazzo said naps can also be detrimental to an individual's sleep cycle and can worsen the sleep problem if not used sparingly and correctly. She said naps taken after 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. and naps longer than 30 to 45 minutes will interrupt an individual's sleep schedule by making it more difficult to fall asleep at night or can result in more awakenings during the night.

Occasional napping is acceptable, she said,

but if napping becomes a daily habit, changes must be made to the individual's sleep schedule.

An important part of sleep is the Rapid Eye Movement stage and part of the function of REM sleep is to help individuals process information and consolidate memories, she said. Naps, she said, should be shorter to avoid reaching the REM stage, which will make it more difficult to awaken from sleep and may then offset their sleep schedule. On the other hand, Randazzo said research demonstrates that when people learn information, if they do not have a REM period following that, their recall and performance on the information is much poorer, making nightly sleep more important.

"Doing an all-nighter and cramming will do less for you than if you were to get a normal night of sleep and have a normal amount of REM throughout the night," Randazzo said. "In terms of studying, the best thing to do is study into the evening, but try to go to bed at a normal time and get a normal amount of sleep, not five hours."

For the most part, there are no long term consequences of sleep deprivation and our bodies can recover from sleep loss quickly, she said. One to two weeks of good quality sleep can help a person function more normally. Most college students typically are dealing with being sleep-deprived because social and academic responsibilities are restricting their opportunity for sleep, so it's easy to fix, she said.

"You just have to make sleep a priority," Randazzo said. "It is a third of your life and anything that is a third of your life is definitely going to affect the other two thirds of your life."

