

# Sleep Education for Athletes

## There are 4 main keys to optimal sleep

- 1. Quantity** – The amount of sleep an athlete needs varies from person to person. Generally, athletes need about 7-9h of sleep per night (8-10h in bed), with a daily 20 minute nap. Napping for 20 minutes has been shown to reduce sleepiness, heighten alertness, increase concentration, and enhance motor performance and mood without the grogginess associated with a longer nap. Think in terms of weekly sleep quantity rather than daily sleep in order to allow some flexibility in your schedule. **Aim to get about 50-60h of sleep per week. For naps, set your alarm for 30 minutes and practice relaxation techniques to aid in falling asleep. Hopefully you will wake up before your alarm and be refreshed and ready to go. Avoid naps if you have problems falling asleep at night. For more information on napping read “Take a Nap! Change your life.” By Sara C. Mednick.**
- 2. Quality** – Athletes need good quality sleep in order to get proper recovery. On rare occasions an athlete may have a sleep disorder – which no amount of sleep could compensate for. **Feeling refreshed upon awakening and not needing an alarm clock is a good sign that you are getting both the quantity and quality that you need.**
- 3. Timing** – We are biologically driven to be “early birds”, “night owls” or somewhere in between. The good news is that our environment (particularly light exposure) can influence when we feel sleepy at night and alert in the morning. **If you are struggling to go to bed before midnight, you may need early morning light exposure to help advance your biological rhythm to be sleepier earlier. Contact us at the Centre to help with this.**

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### 4. ABCs of Sleep Hygiene - Sleep hygiene habits for optimal sleep

**A**void Alcohol, Blue/Bright light, and Caffeine before bed

**Alcohol** – helps you fall asleep more easily, but as it is metabolized you wake up more often. **Limit alcohol to no more than one drink with dinner (4 hours before bed).**

**Blue/Bright Light** – sends a signal to the brain to wake up, which we do not want before bed! Recent research has shown that both electronic devices and bright light can impact your sleep quality and delay your biological rhythm the next day making it harder to fall asleep. **Set a technology and bright light curfew 1 hour before bed. This might include brushing your teeth in the dark if the bathroom lights are bright! Keep technology out of reach so you are not tempted to check it in the middle of the night.**

**Caffeine** – can take up to 12 hours to be metabolized and can increase arousals and time to fall asleep if taken too close to bedtime. **If you find yourself having problems falling asleep, think about your caffeine consumption and if that could be the culprit. If so, set a caffeine curfew of 11 am and avoid food with hidden caffeine in the evening, such as dark chocolate.**

**B**edtime and wake time consistency – sleep is regulated by two processes - the homeostatic process (the longer you are awake = more pressure for sleep) and the circadian process (24h biological rhythm of alertness/drowsiness). Fluctuating bedtimes and wake times can affect both of these processes. For example, if you sleep in two hours on the weekend, both processes will be delayed by about two hours making it harder to fall asleep that evening. **If you have to vary your sleep schedule occasionally, opt for a variation in bedtime. A consistent wake time is important as it is the anchor point for sleep. Try to get bright light in the morning to set your biological rhythm to that wake-up time.**

**C**ave – keep your sleep environment like a cave! Cool, dark, and quiet. Our body temperature drops as we fall asleep making it important to be cool prior to bedtime. Surprisingly a warm bath or shower will temporarily increase our body temperature, but it also quickly plummets so it is a nice precursor to sleep. Both light and sound can impact our sleep quality as well. **Use blackout shades, an eye mask, and earplugs to aid in better quality sleep. Ideally the room temperature should be between 18-20 degrees.**

*\*\*\*If you have tried these tips and are still feeling sleepy during the day, you should seek help from a sleep professional.*