

If Only I Could Sleep!!

Bleep, bleep, bleep...the alarm! Hitting at it blindly, you whimper as the realization hits that you actually must open your eyes through the fog and start your day at the **Guard** or at home.

This is a scenario we've all experienced, many of us multiple times. As a society we are sleep deprived. Most people compensate by getting through their day on a caffeine buzz. Even so, your tiredness affects your performance in ways you don't even know. Sleep loss can cause your thinking to slow down, can make you irritable, and can affect your judgment when it needs to be sharpest: when you're behind the wheel or going into an important meeting. The magnitude of sleep's importance is gradually being understood. Less than a century ago, Americans averaged 9 hours of sleep per night. Those 9 hours have today been shaved to 7.

Why are we so tired?

Simple question, right? Here's the simple answer: We aren't getting enough sleep! Many of us are trying to cram 26 hours of living into each 24 hours of a day.

Why does it matter so much?

Getting enough sleep is often overlooked in importance. But recent research shows sleep deserves a place with a healthy diet and regular exercise as crucial aspects of your continuing mental and physical fitness.

Of utmost importance is the connection between sleep and happiness. We all notice our irritability the day after bad jet lag or a terrible night's sleep, but rarely do we think about this phenomenon over the long-term. Consistently experiencing this aggravation can affect everything from our work performance at the **Guard** to our relationships. Furthermore, sleep deprivation isn't easily made up. Think about it like eating: in order to maintain weight, we must take in a certain number of calories per day. If we over eat one day, we do not just eat a normal amount the next day and thus erase the overeating day; rather, we must either eat less or exercise more to make up for it. Sleep can be thought of in similar terms: if we under-sleep one night, we must make up for these lost hours to clear up the deficit in our "sleep bank". Simply sleeping a normal amount after the sleep-loss night will not allow you to break even. Other, more serious, health problems may also occur from accruing **sleep debt**, such as heart attacks, diabetes, and obesity. Furthermore, studies show sleep deprivation as an increasing threat to public safety when sleep-deprived individuals get behind the wheel. In fact, states will likely start prosecuting accidents caused by exhaustion in a manner similar to that of drunk driving accidents!

How can we combat sleep loss?

There are a number of simple things everyone can do to fight sleep loss:

- Develop a regular bedtime and wake-up schedule, and try to follow it every day.
- Make certain your bedroom and bed are quiet and comfortable. For most people, total darkness is most conducive to sleep. Even a digital alarm clock can create too much light for ideal sleeping conditions.
- Do not use caffeine or alcohol for at least four to six hours before bedtime, as both can disrupt sleep later at night. **People often confuse alcohol as a sleep aid** because of the sleepy feeling associated with it, but in reality it can lead to uneasy sleep and waking up later in the night.
- Exercise regularly, though never directly before bed.
- Avoid eating large, heavy meals late in the evening.
- To counter insomnia, avoid stress and worries at bedtime; deal with them earlier in the day or put them on the back burner until tomorrow.
- Keep a journal by your bed and write down some thoughts, worries, and to-do items before you go to bed.
- Don't argue prior to bedtime. Arguing hypes our stress hormones and makes it difficult to calm down prior to sleep. Make a deal with your significant other, children, friends and families that all arguing needs to end by at least 2 hours before bedtime.
- Make sure your mattress is up to par. A mattress, though you spend hours lying on it, is often neglected.
- **Call us confidentially at 855 HELP GYB (855-435-7492).**

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