Give Yourself The Gift Of Good Rest

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The typical college experience for Metro State students may be slightly different than other universities, as our students are typically older, work full-time and have families to care for. Of course, we have the typical college age student here, too (age 18-21). With the large amount of responsibility students face, fatigue is extremely common. Unfortunately, lack of sleep can do some pretty nasty things to the mind and body.

Some of the short-term problems caused by lack of sleep are: headache, anxiety, muscle pain, upset stomach, lower immunity to illness, and irritability. No student needs that! Worse yet, according to Mayo Clinic, long-term effects can be even worse. These include heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes, while long-term fatigue stresses the body and causes unwanted tension.

Last year, I decided it was a wise idea to take ten credits and work full-time. I would get up in the morning for my 7 a.m. shift, work till 4 p.m., go to night classes, and normally not go to bed until midnight. For me, the fatigue turned into migraines and depression. When I went to the doctor I was told to either go on medication, or get more sleep. After a few more months of struggling, I decided to focus on school and work part-time. Because of that, sleep was something I could attain. However, this is not the case with many Metro State students.

So why do we need sleep? According to scientists at Harvard University, sleep is a needed function to keep us alive. They compare it to eating. It is the time that the brain recharges, hormones are released to regulate growth, tissue is repaired, and major restorative functions happen. One new theory is brain plasticity. The idea is that, during sleep, the brain structures and organizes thoughts. Sleep is also important for working (short-term) and long-term memory. Sleep and improved memory are indeed linked.

That impacts students in multiple ways. The University of Georgia looked into the problem of sleep deprived students. They found most of their students slept 6-6.9 hours a night (my doctor always recommended I get 7-8 hours). However, everyone is slightly different in what their body needs. The problem is, with full schedules, it is hard to get a full night of sleep.

The University of Georgia’s studies found that being sleep deprived lowered a student's GPA, increased the amount of car accidents on campus, increased clinic visits for colds and flu, and contributed to weight gain. Scary to think that our fellow students are going through similar experiences.

I urge you to try and get more sleep. Little things like cutting out caffeine intake after 1 p.m. can help you get a better night of sleep. Making a daily plan that includes exercise (even just a walk during the day) and a normal bedtime routine is wise. Instead of watching TV before bed, find a good novel to read, or gentle music to help you glide off to sleep. Drink a cup of herbal (non-caffeinated) tea. A few different brands make sleepy-time teas that include Valerian, an herb that promotes sleep. However, if you are on medications, it’s wise to find out about using any kind of supplement to make sure there are no adverse reactions to your meds.

I wish you all the best this holiday season. Most of all, I wish you to get some good, restorative rest.