Alice,

Since final exams, I have been sleeping way more than I did during the semester. Normally, I can get by on six to eight hours a night, with maybe one morning to sleep late, if I've been leaning to the six-hour end for too many nights. And I would sometimes even wake up in the A.M. before any alarm clock and just get up since I would be wide awake. (Which was a good thing...) But lately, I've been sleeping for eight to twelve hours a night, and still feel groggy when I do get up. I'm not doing anything noticeably different now than during the spring semester and don't think I'm depressed about anything. I would like to get up at seven or eight A.M. like I'm used to doing, but I just can't drag myself out of bed.

? Any suggestions?

Answer

Dear Any suggestions?,

We each have a system of biological clocks that dictate our physiology and behavior. These internal clocks are usually well synchronized with the external clocks we have come to accept in society, so we are most often unaware of their existence. Circadian rhythms are cycles of biological functions regulated by your internal clock and they typically run for a period of twenty-four hours. These natural internal rhythms can become out of sync when disturbed by stressors, such as flying across several time zones, or by erratic sleeping and waking habits. Additionally, life changes (moving, new or ending relationships, a new job) can impact our sleep patterns.

Once your biological rhythms are out of phase, you are more prone to feel stress in the form of irritability, exhaustion, and lowered resistance to illness. There's no "magic bullet" to fix sleep issues, so it may take a little trial and error to find the best solution for you.

Suggestions to Help Regulate Sleeping Patterns:

- Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day. If you need to, change the time you go to bed to make sure you get enough sleep.
- Sleep in a cool, dark, and quiet room. Wear earplugs or create white noise with a fan to screen out external interruptions.
• Avoid alcohol near bedtime. It can interrupt REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the most important part of the sleep cycle. If you consume caffeine, try to do so earlier in the day.
• Sugar can also cause peaks and rises in energy levels throughout the day; consider cutting back on refined sugars and avoiding heavy meals near bedtime.
• Exercising before bed keeps some people awake, but helps others sleep. Do a little experimenting to see what time of day exercise works best for you.
• Keep activities like watching TV, reading, or surfing the internet out of your bed. Reserve your bed as a sanctuary for sleeping, cuddling, and sex.

If the resources above don't work for you or if you simply want another perspective, consider meeting with a health care provider. You briefly mentioned depression and it's important to know that depression can be related to sleepiness or oversleeping. If this is a continuing concern, you could consider visiting with a mental health provider.

Sweet dreams,

Alice!

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Sleep [3]

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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [9]
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Mental Health Service (CUMC) [12]

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