

Transcript: Interview with Claire

Chapman Learning Commons



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Madeleine: How come adequate sleep/wellness practice can be so difficult for students to achieve?

Claire: It really comes down to the fact that, as students, we're super busy sometimes. There's only 24 hours in a day, yet there are so many responsibilities we have, not just as students with varying academic workloads, but also in other areas of our lives. A lot of students that are currently enrolled in classes at UBC are working one, if not multiple, jobs to pay for things like tuition, rent, and other expenses. And then, you know, we can also acknowledge the fact that university is ultimately a great time for really getting to know yourself, what you like, if you're passionate about anything, connecting with others. So students are also engaging in other activities like volunteering, research, clubs, mentorship programs, and other extracurriculars.

Additionally, there is also a large portion of UBC students that commute to campus. For some students that live two hours away, this can mean rising at 5:30 am in the morning which can also be difficult for some trying to get seven to nine hours of sleep every night. Some people may just have physiologically rooted issues that impact their ability to fall asleep, stay asleep, etc., which also makes sleep more difficult to get.

In addition to this, it's not just about the amount of hours that you get, it's also about the way you sleep, how you set up your sleep environment, your bedtime routines - in other words: sleep hygiene. So if we think about those best practices we're supposed to engage in like reducing screen time before bed, going to sleep at a consistent time each night, and eating a well-balanced diet, we don't always have the ability to engage in these.

Madeleine: How might the quality of sleep affect academic performance? Do you have any specific experiences you could share where sleep quality has affected academics either positively or negatively?

Claire: Everybody's body is different and therefore, some people's academic performance is going to be more affected by the sleep they get in comparison to others. Many studies and research have shown that some of the benefits to getting quality sleep include things like memory consolidation, better concentration, increased productivity and ability to engage in learning, and more energy.

Sleep also does things like boost your immune system, boost your mood, lower stress, and promote better decision-making, which can all indirectly lead to more positive academic performance. I have friends and folks that I've chatted with as a student leader in the health and well-being world and some people are really, really affected when they don't get sleep. Sometimes it can lead to making minor errors on exams, falling asleep during lectures, or just not feeling as refreshed or in their best work mindset when they're trying to study.

When I compare myself to my friends, we're all different. I used to get two to four hours of sleep during heavy midterm seasons and final seasons. I really wish I knew about the science and the importance of getting a good night's rest before because maybe that would have really changed my relationship with sleep earlier.

Madeleine: What practices can be adopted to facilitate better sleep/wellness, and better quality of life as a student?

Claire: Here are the four things that have worked for me. I think number one is aiming for those seven to nine hours of sleep each day. This one was probably the hardest change but also the one that, to be honest, just had the most impact. For me, this really happened by setting firm boundaries for myself regarding sleep and really just my wellbeing in general. So, in my final year, over the past 12 months, if I started getting really tired and couldn't study anymore, or it was like 12 or 1am, I usually just called it a night, no matter where I was with my work. I would just kind of wake up and aim to look at it the next morning. This usually worked out in my favor and sometimes actually leaving my work to the morning with a fresh set of eyes [sic].

Second of all, cutting out caffeine was a big one! Caffeine can increase a lot of feelings of anxiety and restlessness when it's bedtime. In addition, sometimes drinking it too close to bedtime can lead to digestion issues which can also keep you up.

Another thing was engaging in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day. We can do this just by embedding a really quick morning workout before classes to get your day going, or even just making sure that you get like a 30-minute walk once a day.

Then finally, I think educating myself more on sleep and why sleep was important [sic] also was a game-changer. I think for me, I started getting more serious about getting more sleep and sleeping properly once I educated myself regarding why sleep is so important, the short-term effects, the long-term effects [sic]. The sleep you get now has a lot of impact on keeping you healthy throughout your life and preventing neurological, mental health, cardiovascular, inflammatory, and immune-related disorders and illnesses down the road.

So, as promised, here are some of my recommended resources regarding sleep. The [Wellness Center online](#) has a page under our "Thriving at a Distance" module entitled "Thrive by Sleeping Well". This has been really helpful for some folks, as well as three published peer stories written by UBC students, our peer health educators, that describe their own experiences of revamping their own sleep routines and best practices surrounding these things. I also recommend the books ["Why We Sleep" by Matthew Walker](#) and ["The Sleep Solution" by Chris Winter](#). These are some bestsellers that people have found helpful. There's also some podcasts on Spotify and Apple that are dedicated to sleep science and best practices.