

Transcript: Interview with Jin

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

Jin: As university students, you're juggling both your academic life and academic performance, along with maintaining a social life and having fun. A lot of times this is particularly difficult because we don't have enough time in the day and what we end up doing is sacrificing time we would get put towards sleep [sic], or we may not prioritize sleep as a result.

Another major factor I would think that contributes to this is just general stress. So this could be either academic stress from taking finals or doing long courses, or also stress in your own personal or social life. Another form of stress that a lot of people, that university students in particular, may be facing is it may be their first time living away from home or living in a different country, so you don't necessarily have that same support network you normally do. It's kind of like this vicious cycle where typically if you don't... if you're really stressed out [sic] during the day you may experience worse sleep that night, which means that you might experience more stress the next day because you're tired or fatigued, which may result in poor sleep the subsequent night. So it kind of goes around; these things are all interconnected.

So, for example, during exam season students are experiencing higher amounts of stress and probably spending more time studying or even cramming late into the night to do well on these exams. In addition to that, you know, exams being at the end of the term, a lot of your friends may be leaving or going home so you want to kind of see them right before, you want to catch them right before they leave [sic]. And while, you know, some people may be able to balance these out or be lucky and have, say, be done with finals and then go hang out with friends, sometimes not everyone has that luxury.

So, again, people typically sacrifice time they would put towards sleeping to meet these other kinds of demands. This is called "social jet lag" which is a research term which basically means that you sleep differently during the weekdays versus the weekend because you're trying to maintain these different aspects of your life, academically but also socially.

So I think part of maintaining good sleep hygiene during university partially involves just simply acknowledging that you may not have enough time to do everything you would want to do and still be able to get enough sleep. So this could mean being more selective in terms of how you spend your time or in terms of planning ahead so you know you can budget time to ensure that you're able to do things that you would like to do but also getting enough sleep.

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?

Jin: Generally, the consensus is that people who get less or poor quality of sleep often are related to lower academic performance. And there's a number of reasons to why poor sleep relates towards academic performance such as, you know, when you're sleep deprived it's hard—it may be difficult [sic] to concentrate or stay awake, so you're a bit fatigued.

It's been shown that you have less memory retention so it's hard to necessarily retain things that you're learning in courses or during lectures. You may be feeling a greater amount of stress in your life so that could also be distracting or impede working [sic] on homework or working on assignments. So you might be spending more time on things that would take you less time.

Or even sleep has been shown to—poor sleep [sic] has been shown to suppress your immune system, so it could also be just like coming down with a cold because you know you're just too tired and you just didn't get enough rest. But I would also like to emphasize that getting one night of good sleep before an exam may not be enough necessarily to affect your academic performance. I read one study that found that better quality and longer duration sleep were related to higher academic performance, but also sleep consistency was also related to higher grades in this study.

I like [sic] to also just say that I think a lot of people focus on the number of hours we sleep. The general recommended hours is like seven to nine; however there's

actually a lot of research that shows that there's actually quite a bit of variation. So, for example, if you get six hours of sleep you might be fine and you know you might be chipper, and that's like your ideal number of time. But if I get six hours I'm kind of just like, I don't know, in a low mood or more tired and fatigued so I don't function well.

So in terms of prioritizing or thinking about how long you sleep, you should just kind of see: when do you naturally wake up? That's kind of—that'll [sic] kind of give you an idea of what your ideal time is or how much sleep do you need to get to wake up and feel rested and alert.

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

Jin: The first thing I would just say that's important is try to maintain a consistent sleep schedule. And by consistent I mean—I don't [sic] mean you have to sleep at the same time on the dot every day, but you know within like half an hour to an hour of usually when you sleep. So, for example I sleep typically between 11:30 and 12 and that's usually enough time and I usually wake up around 7:30 or 7 or something like that. Over time your body will naturally get tired at certain times, so for example, I would naturally get tired around 11:30 so that will actually help you go to sleep faster.

Another thing I would say is, again, try to avoid using your electronics or phones or laptops before falling asleep. Having that light in your face can sometimes make it a lot more difficult to actually fall asleep. You know, your eyes might get a little bit tired, but you know, it's still the bright light might—even if you turn it down—might hinder yourself from falling asleep fast [sic]. So one thing I would recommend and something I sometimes do, is if I really want to fall asleep to like an episode or something, I'll turn off the screen so it's black. And I'll just kind of listen to it, or I'll listen to a podcast, or an audiobook, and that usually helps, because then you can have both the kind of stimulation of listening to something as you fall asleep but without the jarring light in your eyes.

Another thing that's been generally recommended is not to have a huge meal or exercise right before bed. I would say that if you really can't sleep, I think over-the-counter medication like melatonin could be useful. Although, I will generally caution people from you turning to melatonin or any kind of sleep aids right away because over time you don't want to be really dependent on that and then not be able to fall asleep naturally.

I would say that at the end of the day, you just have to kind of commit to doing that yourself. You know, there's no magic pill or magic method that will help you get good sleep, and it usually requires a commitment to really get yourself to be honest; stick with a schedule, and you know, a little bit of time management where you kind of need to maybe plan ahead.

References:

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