

ALCOHOL, SLEEP, AND LEARNING

College students may think that moderate drinking has no negative effects on learning and health. As little as one drink, however, can impair a person's ability to get a good night's sleep, which can lead to more significant problems.

Most people find that a drink or two before bed helps them fall asleep faster. This may be true. However, as alcohol is metabolized during the night, sleep becomes progressively lighter and more disturbed. Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep may also be particularly affected. Disturbances of sleep lead to fatigue and sleepiness during the day. The more one drinks, the faster the person will fall asleep, but the likelihood of sleep disturbances increases. Alcohol consumed up to 6 hours before bedtime can affect sleep patterns, increasing the longevity of disturbances alcohol causes in the body's sleep cycles.

The average adult sleeps for 8 hrs a night, though different people may "need" more or less sleep. People who do not get enough sleep are more susceptible to:

- depression disorders
- decreased cognitive abilities
- learning impairment
- memory deficits
- irritability
- poor concentration
- impaired social and occupational function
- coordination/performance impairment
- medical conditions such as heart disease

Lack of sleep and alcohol consumption is common occurrences in a college student's life. Many college students are significantly sleep-deprived. The adverse effects of alcohol on sleep magnify this effect. Both of these practices can have negative effects on cognitive abilities, especially when paired together.

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Alcohol and Sleep. Available at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>.



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