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**Headline: Commentary: Getting more sleep might land you that promotion**

## **Commentary: Getting more sleep might land you that promotion**

Studies show that Singapore is one of the most sleep deprived countries in the world. But getting enough sleep is strongly associated with increased productivity in your job, says one organisational behaviour expert.



(Photo: Unsplash/Hutomo Abrianto)

SINGAPORE: My wife and I were in the middle of our healthy little debate on whether we should subscribe to Netflix. We had heard about the endless options of films, documentaries and TV shows that we could choose from.

For her, the decisive factor was the ability to access a repository of Korean dramas. I was more concerned with whether we would end up glued to our devices and forget the existence of our three children.

However, a more valid concern was whether this newfound subscription would eat into our already precious sleeping hours.

### **MOST HARDWORKING PEOPLE IN THE WORLD**

Studies show that Singaporeans are some of the hardest working people in the world, averaging between 45 and 50 hours a week at work. Thus, it is not surprising that we would also spend less time sleeping.

A maker of sleep trackers, Jawbone, found in a worldwide study in 2014 that Singapore is the third most sleep-deprived city in the world after Tokyo and Seoul, averaging about six hours and 32 minutes of sleep daily.

Market research firm Wakefield Research placed us as the second most sleep-deprived country, coming in only after the British. This same study also found that Singapore millennials (defined in Singapore's context as those born between 1980 and 2000) make up the biggest proportion of a generational cohort who sleep in on the weekends to overcome their sleep debt.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends that adults aged between 18 and 64 get between seven to nine hours of sleep.

### **WHO TO BLAME FOR OUR SLEEP EPIDEMIC?**

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So why are we sleeping less? Some put the blame on technological innovation. Technological advancement seeks to enable humans to do more with less.

However, it almost seems that with improved technologies, we have less time for anything else. We are able to do more, but we also extend our working hours to do even more work, leaving us less time for sleep.

Others attribute blame to our easy access to a myriad of late-night eating options. The introduction of app-based food delivery services means that food can be readily available at one's fingertips in a matter of minutes, satisfying our late night cravings.

## MILLENNIALS GET THE LEAST SLEEP

When we think about the topic of sleep, the narrative is that older people need less sleep. However, it seems that millennials, who are in need of between seven to nine hours of sleep, are getting much less than what experts recommend. Why is this so?

First, many millennials belong to the age group where career foundations are still being established. It is never easy to build up something from scratch. The learning curve might be a little steep and the work intense.

As such, young people need to learn a large amount of content and job-related competencies. This can be time-consuming.

Second, millennials may venerate a culture of sleeping less, where sleep is not viewed as a necessity but a means to an end. As a result of embracing such a philosophy, those who choose to sleep early may be perceived as not hardworking enough; or that one is complacent with life.

Coming to work or school with little or no sleep may give others the perception that you are a driven and hardworking team player.

Third, millennials place high value on meaningful experiences. While the motivation of financial gain cannot be underestimated, it is the opportunity to learn and undergo meaningful experiences that excite many millennials.

The fear of missing out (FOMO) motivates the millennial to see more, do more and experience more. In order that learning opportunities or unique experiences be maximised, it is not surprising that one's waking hours are extended in order to pursue these opportunities.

After all, you only live once (YOLO).

## WHY WE NEED MORE SLEEP

As humans, we need sleep to allow the body to repair itself in order to be ready for the next day's challenges. Dr Maiken Nedergaard, Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Rochester likens the brain cleansing process during sleep to a dishwasher.

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Cerebrospinal fluid in the brain flushes a harmful protein waste called beta-amyloid that accumulates during one's waking moments. This flushing process may also help lower the risk of Alzheimer's disease. Insufficient sleep may lead to poorer decision-making and reduced alertness.

A person deprived of sleep may be likened to someone under the influence of alcohol. The impact on verbal learning and short-term memory recognition are also adversely affected.

Militaries around the world have been studying the effects of sleep deprivation due to the unpredictable tempo and nature of warfighting. Unfortunately, it is still difficult to practice what is being preached.

An example in point is when the United States Navy attributed some of the blame for the 2017 separate deadly collisions by the guided-missile destroyers USS John S McCain and USS Fitzgerald on unhealthy sleeping patterns, resulting in crew fatigue. This attribution suggests that the ships' command leadership downplayed the importance of sufficient sleep for the crew.

## REVERSING THE SLEEP DEBT

What then can we do to reverse this sleep debt in so many of us?

For starters, avoid watching the television, using the laptop, tablet or mobile phone one hour before bedtime. Such devices emit blue light that suppresses sleep-enhancing melatonin and delta brainwaves that promote deep sleep.

Secondly, try to ensure that your sleep environment is dark, cool and quiet. If the environment does not promote such ideals, earplugs and sleeping eye masks may help improve your situation.

However, the most important way to deal with your sleep debt is to change your mindset. Naturally, those whose work requires shift duty will find this much more difficult as working during odd hours is part of the job.

But for the rest of us, it takes some discipline and a mindset change in order to lead a lifestyle that encourages sufficient sleep. One simple method to set an alarm to remind you of the need to turn off your devices one hour before bedtime.

If you are working from home, let your colleagues know that you would like them to respect a cut-off time, after which you will go offline. These must be non-negotiable rules that only you can enforce.

Finally, to my millennial friends, I can only advise that sufficient sleep is strongly associated with increased productivity in your job. If you really like your career to take off, perhaps it is time to reconsider how you feel towards sleep.

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