



Sleep Debt

Welcome to this week's discussion

The focus this week is the importance of reducing cumulative sleep loss.

What is Sleep Debt?

“Sleep Debt” is a term used to describe cumulative sleep loss resulting from ongoing sleep restriction. If you regularly get less sleep than you need, your accumulated sleep debt will grow larger over time. This sleep debt may make you tired, grumpy, and prone to accidents and illness.

Calculating Your Sleep Debt

What's your personal sleep debt? Start with the amount of sleep you need to feel rested and alert. If you need 8 hours of sleep each night but only get 7 hours on average, you accumulate a sleep debt of 7 hours each week. Over the course of a year, you've lost 364 total hours of sleep, equivalent to nearly 7 weeks of sleep.

Can you Repay Your Sleep Debt?

With the increased awareness of the dangers of sleep deprivation, many night owls and chronic sleep-skippers wonder if they can repay their looming “sleep debt.”

The answer is no, for the most part. Once sleep is missed, it's gone for good. Sleeping more for a night or two can help restore some of the cognitive decline caused by a large sleep debt.

However, when a sleep-deprived individual slumbers, the body works to “make up” some lost sleep by spending more time in the deeper, more restorative stages of sleep, and less time in lighter-stage sleep.

Scientists observe changes to the sleep stages in people who don't sleep enough, which generally resolve if the person starts sleeping more. But because each sleep stage is vital to our mental and physical wellbeing, it's vital to allow enough time for the body to move through all stages of sleep, and not chronically deprive yourself of the rest you need.



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Know your sleep requirements

Erasing your Sleep Debt

- The best way to stay out of sleep debt? First, stop adding to your sleep debt by making a real effort to get adequate sleep each night.
- Determine the amount of sleep you need to feel well-rested, and create a schedule that allows enough time for sleep.
- A sleep journal can help track your sleep patterns to help you see how much you're sleeping overall.
- Once you decide how much sleep you need each night, solid sleep hygiene habits (e.g. no screen time for an hour before bed) will help keep your sleep routine on track

Did you know:

- A 2003 study in the journal Sleep found that sometimes the more tired we get, the less tired we feel. That's why many of us can lay in bed exhausted but unable to drop off.

Discuss in your teams:

- Discuss with the person next to you the typical amount of sleep you get a night? What is the recommended amount of sleep?
- What level of sleep debt do you incur over a week? You may wish to help team members calculate their debt.
- What kind of things would be done if you had good sleep hygiene?
- If you have young children or are a carer, how do you think you could minimise your sleep debt?
- Can you remember a time when you accumulated a sleep debt? How did you feel, what effects did it have?