

# The science is in: don't scrimp on your sleep

By Wendy Squires

It's been near on 40 hours since I've had sleep. And damn it's ugly. There have been tears and tantrums, complaints and condemnations. I am irritable and unreasonable. In other words, I have been reduced to the mercurial, emotional madness of a 14-year-old girl.

You see, I just got off a plane from Europe. At every stop of my curiously circuitous re-routed journey home, the flight was delayed. In every waiting lounge I was forced to endure overcrowding and the foul fragrance of fart. Each allocated seat was so tight my chin could rest on my knees. All the flight attendants I encountered were United Airlines worthy, with only a dragging from seat badge to graduate. The experience was as horrendous as the swill that was served with the indignant assurance it was, in fact, food.



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To keep myself from going postal I decided I could no longer follow news of Donald Trump's missile attacks and subsequent self-stroking of his already aroused id. Instead, I read my friend Madonna King's latest book (yes, one of those things with paper pages) *Being 14*, and damn if it didn't scare my free airline socks off.

Apart from being forever grateful I do not have to face a child of my own creation navigating the tenuous transition from girl to woman in this age of social media, selfies and self-

entitlement, I saw a bigger problem for society as a whole. It was one I was experiencing at the very moment of reading – a chronic lack of sleep.

While in the book King discusses how problems associated with drowsy teenagers include impaired learning, mood swings, anxiety, depression, negative body image, low self-esteem, poor food choices, increased absenteeism and lowered immunity, it didn't fare well for adults either.

King quotes Andrew May, a partner in the KPMG performance clinic, who cites a study that found sleeping for only six hours a night for 12 days straight is the same as being awake a full 24 hours. "And the cognitive and physical performance of someone who's been awake for 24 hours is similar to a person with a blood alcohol reading of 0.1."

"The impact of sleep deprivation affects everything from attention and concentration to emotional reactions, problem-solving skills and even moral judgment." (May doesn't mention the affect it also has on relationships, so sorry to my boyfriend and anyone else who has had to deal with me since I got home.)

May's comments reflects 2016 research conducted by the Sleep Foundation and The University of Adelaide, which found Australia is in the midst of a "sleepiness epidemic", with 33 to 45 per cent of adults sleeping either poorly or not long enough most nights, leaving them fatigued, irritable and in danger. Luckily, I am not usually one of them.

My need for sleep - at least eight hours in my case – has been something I have had to defend in recent years. I often hear the "you snooze you lose" philosophy, along with the annoying adage "you can sleep when you're dead". (I protest this by saying "it's not much use being alive if you're dead on your feet".)

It appears having had little sleep is a badge of honour of sorts these days. Talk to new mothers and you will be forgiven for thinking they haven't had a wink since labour. Ask a successful business person and they of talk of naps on planes as sufficient. Cramming all night for an exam is expected by students and, after reading King's book, it's evident that FOMO is keeping anxious teens glued to their screens until the wee hours.

Successful sleep dodgers like to cite famous others who have run countries and global corporations on four hours or less: Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Bill Clinton, Bill Gates and even two-time Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. And while these people may have deemed themselves effective despite their lack of sleep, it does make me wonder just how proficient they would have been with a good eight hours.

This contradiction of reason applied to a girlfriend of mine who gets up at 5am every morning to exercise, despite not getting to bed until after midnight on average and complaining constantly of a lack of sleep.

She says she hates her alarm with a passion and never "wants" to rise and could "sleep forever", however believes exercise is imperative to her good health and should be a priority over rest.

"I have two teenagers and need to keep up with them," she explains. "How can I do that if I'm not fit?"

I can tell her how – go back to bed. Take Madonna King's book with you and make sure your teens are tucked up too. Because sleep is the third pillar of health alongside diet and exercise, yet is be perceived as luxury or indulgence today by too many.

Skip sleep regularly and you'll likely feeling like I do today post flights, unravelled and rattled, yet mistake fatigue as a normal emotional and cognitive state. Add two teens to that equation is akin to adding nitro to glycerin. Not a good idea.

Now, as a community service, I'm off to bed. And just try to wake me – I dare you!

Source; <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-science-is-in-dont-scrimp-on-your-sleep-20170414-gvkwj6.html>