

Why you need 30 minutes of extra sleep

By Andrew May



A lack of shut-eye can break you physically and emotionally.

There must be something in the water right now because so many people around me are having babies.

Jason, the COO of my business, and Jen, our head of client services, have both had little ones in the past month. There were also five parents of newborns at a workshop I was speaking at last week.

There was no denying their enthusiasm for being there, but their glazed-over complexion was definitely evidence of lack of sleep.

As a parent myself, I know how difficult it can be to think clearly after a disrupted night staying up with the little ones. However, you don't realise the impact until you see it first-hand. Case in point, my good mate Jason.

Are you OK?

While walking back from a meeting earlier this week I looked at Jason and said, "You OK, mate?"

He just stared at me. "After getting zero sleep last night I don't know whether to laugh or cry," he said.

We sat down, ordered him a very strong coffee, and spoke about how sleep deprivation is still the number one way people get others to talk. It's the unfortunate truth that captors taking hostages,

whether in a James Bond movie or real-life situation, still use sleep deprivation as a means to get them to start talking.

It's only a matter of time before the lack of shut-eye breaks you physically, and emotionally. While fitness and healthy eating gives you an extra advantage, it doesn't solve the problem of poor productivity, crappy communication skills, zero creativity, and bad decision-making.

What are we doing to our bodies and brains when many are walking around sleep-deprived?

A land of walking zombies

Sleep deprivation has widespread impacts on your physical health, but it also affects cognitive ability. I know when I've been travelling lots or burning the midnight oil, I major in low-level activities.

When I'm tired I fly into email, organising my expense claims and getting back to people on social media. When I'm tired and fatigued I shy away from high-level cognitive activity like writing new material, business strategy or designing new programs.

"We know from our research that having inadequate sleep causes bad cognitive function," says the Australasia Sleep Association's president-elect Dr Maree Barnes. "If we put people who have had anything less than the recommended 7.5 hours sleep in a lab to measure their cognitive function, and then give them the chance to sleep more, they perform better on the same test after more sleep."

Brain snap

The brain is affected more than just cognitively after a restless night, with emotions and social interactions affected as well.

Have you ever snapped at your partner, colleagues or even your friends after a restless night? There's good reason for that. Sleep deprivation hinders activity in the prefrontal lobe of the brain, an area associated with emotions and complex thinking, resulting in poor people skills (to put it nicely).

Research in the *Journal of Biology* highlights that without sleep, the emotional centres of the brain dramatically overreact to negative experiences. This is because the prefrontal lobe, an area responsible for emotional control, shuts down following sleep deprivation.

"It is almost as though, without sleep, the brain reverts back to a more primitive pattern of activity, becoming unable to put emotional experiences into context and produce controlled, appropriate responses," says Matthew Walker, one of the researchers from the University of California, Berkeley.

Take-home message: power nap before you power snap at someone.

The cost of sleep loss

The decisions you make when you're too tired (but still slightly wired from your 10th cup of coffee) could cost you and your company enormously. Not good news if you're in the finance game.

A study published in the Journal of Neuroscience found that a sleepy brain makes overly-optimistic gambles. When participants were asked to make money-based decisions after pulling an all-nighter, their strategy was to try and maximise their winnings instead of defending against potential losses.

Bad decisions aren't mutually exclusive to finance situations, with some of the most devastating human and environmental health disasters, like Chernobyl, attributed to sleep loss and fatigue. This is because your ability to process new information decreases, your brain is easily distracted, and your short-term memory is impaired.

Avoid disastrous decision-making by asking for time extensions on big deals and complex tasks to ensure you don't make the wrong move.

Take control of your sleep

Cramming that little bit extra into your day really won't help if it comes at the cost of less sleep. "The bottom line is that sleep is not a luxury that we can optionally choose to take whenever we like. It is a biological necessity, and without it, there is only so far the band will stretch before it snaps, with both cognitive and emotional consequences," says Walker.

Here are five ways to take control of your sleep and boost your productivity at work:

1) Make sleep a priority

Aim to get at least seven to eight hours sleep most nights of the week, including the weekend.

2) Timing is everything

Sleep and wake at the same time each day – your body doesn't know Wednesday from Saturday, so changing up your sleep routine can mess with your biological clock

3) Stop hitting snooze

It's better to go to bed 30 minutes earlier than to hit the snooze button continuously.

4) Optimise your environment

Keep your bedroom cool and dark. While quantity of sleep is important, you need to ensure it's quality, too. Invest in a good mattress, keep your room at a constant temperature and use dark blinds to keep the light out.

5) Settle down before bed

Avoid large meals, alcohol, and sugar before bed - these can all disrupt your sleep, making it hard to feel rested the next day. Eat your last meal at least two to three hours before bed and do something to help you relax 30 minutes before bed.

Source: <http://www.executivestyle.com.au/why-you-need-30-minutes-of-extra-sleep-gl244z#ixzz3rtVCPHMo>