



For you, your career, and your life

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Resident Assistance Program Newsletter

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A Good Night's Sleep: The Impossible Dream?

Sleep. You crave it, but it may seem that you'll have to wait until you complete your residency before you get a decent night's sleep again. What risks do you take when you are sleep-deprived? You might be surprised at what researchers are discovering about how sleep loss affects us, and what you can do to minimize the risks.

A sleep-deprived doctor runs the risk of serious consequences, not only on the job but after work as well.

"Some tasks appear to be much more difficult to perform with a sleep deficit, and our studies show that there can be variability in the performance of nearly any task in the sleep-deprived," says David Dinges, Ph.D., professor of Psychology in Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine



"Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together."

- Thomas Dekker (1572—1632)

and director of the Division of Sleep and Chronobiology. "It may be difficult to pay attention over prolonged periods, such as when watching blood gas monitors. Even short duration tasks can be affected. This may include tasks that involve memory, executive function and complex decisions."

The problem of sleep deprivation is made worse by time pressure, Dinges explains. "When you are tired, your brain will try to go slower to get an answer correct. So when you are doing something that requires a fast response, or have too many things going on at once, you can make mistakes."

For some doctors, the lack of sleep doesn't begin to affect performance until they are off the job. "You may have a situation in which a physician is able to remain alert and work while in a hospital setting, but then falls asleep at a traffic light on the drive home," Dinges notes. "Driving after a long shift is especially risky, because paying attention becomes more difficult."

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania continue to explore the complex links between sleep deprivation and

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performance. "Some of our recent findings are somewhat surprising, as we had assumed that chronic sleep deprivation affects everyone's performance in the same way," Dinges says. "Our discoveries seem counterintuitive. As our research subjects were deprived of sleep over time, the differences in performance became larger and larger. Some people had very rapid rates of performance degradation, some were in the middle range, and still others showed few or no effects."

Regardless of how lack of sleep affects you, there are some things you can do to minimize the risks that accompany it. "Know your limits and vulnerabilities. Try to get sleep *before* you know you will be deprived," Dinges recommends. "Then make sure you allow a period of recovery sleep."

Seriously consider moving closer to work. Think about how many hours a year you could have available for sleep if you cut even 30 minutes a day off your commute time.

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Money Matters

Looking Ahead to 2011

As the year 2010 draws to a close, it's normal to feel that time is flying by and we are scrambling to keep up. Getting a better sense of control about our financial lives can help ease that discomfort. You can start planning now for what you hope to achieve in 2011.

Hold a family meeting and talk about the things your family wants or needs, keeping in mind that "wants" are not the same as "needs." Look over your finances and decide what is actually possible. Then, put your new goals down on paper and start your progress toward them. Here are some common goals you might consider.

Getting out of debt: Almost every household has some debt they'd like to vanquish from their lives. Why not make 2011 the year that you finally defeat yours? Chart out a course for your path out of debt. How much money will you devote to your creditors each month? How will you avoid accumulating any additional debt? With a clear plan, you can be certain to take a bite out of the debt that is strangling so many families.

Set up an emergency fund: To avoid having to go into debt whenever you're faced with one of life's unexpected curveballs, you need to have an emergency fund set up. For a bare bones emergency fund, you should work towards saving \$1,000. That's enough money to provide you a little cushion in the face of an emergency.

Upcoming major purchases: As you make plans for 2011, anticipate major purchases. Has your car been making odd noises? You may need to include purchasing a new one in your plans. Is your family planning to take a vacation in 2011? Determine how much you'll need to save to cover those expenses.

Make 2011 the year you set and accomplish all of your financial goals.

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A Good Night's Sleep *continued*

Changes like eliminating 'vegetative' activities in favor of friendships, intimacy and personal care can counterbalance periods of sleep deprivation. Dinges also suggests taking naps when possible. "When you have to sleep in the daytime, turn off your cell phone, TV and radio, blacken windows and wear earplugs to maximize the sleep environment."

These are all fairly easy solutions, but effective for establishing patterns of behavior in which you can recharge your batteries. If you suspect insomnia or apnea—even if you think it's induced by your work schedule—it's important to be evaluated at a sleep disorder center to identify a treatable disorder now, before it becomes a chronic problem.

Prioritizing sleep in your lifestyle can have long-term benefits, Dinges says. "It should be part of your schedule, not just what is left over after everything else."

Giving Yourself the Gift of Time

You deserve some time just for yourself, your family and your friends. Yet you have so little time to spend on anything besides your professional responsibilities. Organization expert Denise Landers, author of *Destination Organization*, offers these tips for carving out time for yourself:

- Take an honest look at all the tasks that must be done, and delegate what you don't love doing.
- Block out periods of uninterrupted time. Every time you are interrupted, it takes about 20 minutes to get back into the flow of what you were doing.
- Skip the multitasking. You will be far more focused if you don't task your brain with doing two things at once.
- Keep an interruption log for two weeks. Once you identify what is getting you off track, you can start making changes.
- Schedule it. Include everything that is important to you in your weekly schedule—work, key events, time with family and friends, meals, exercise, and sleep. Some days you may only have a window of 20 minutes here and there, but if it's in your schedule you can make the most of it. Take notes about what didn't work and adjust the next week's schedule.
- Don't put accomplishing tasks over your relationships with other people.

Resources

National Sleep Foundation: www.sleepfoundation.org

Sleep Research Society: www.sleepresearchsociety.org

Key Organization: www.keyorganization.com

Denise Landers' Blog:

www.keyorganization.com/blog/5-ways-to-save-time-this-holiday-season

"The Myth of Multitasking: How 'Doing it All' Gets Nothing Done," by Dave Crenshaw, John Wiley & Sons (2008)

"The Now Habit," by Neil Fiore, Penguin Group (2007)