SLEEP AND WELLNESS FOR COLLEGIATE ATHLETES

**WHY** does sleep matter for collegiate athletes?

**Athletic performance** ► Poor sleep is associated with delayed response time, fatigue and poor decision-making.

**Injury risk and recovery** ► Athletes who are sleep deprived have an elevated risk of musculoskeletal injury and delayed recovery following injuries.

**Academic performance** ► Sleep deprivation impairs cognitive performance and is linked to lower GPA.

**Mental health** ► Inadequate sleep increases the risk for mental health symptoms and disorders, and mental health symptoms and disorders may reduce sleep quality and quantity.

Are student-athletes getting **ENOUGH** sleep?

On average, in-season student-athletes are getting **6.27 hours of sleep nightly** while 8 hours of sleep are recommended.

**61% of student-athletes report daytime fatigue** at least three or more days in the past week, while 19% of male and 23% of female student-athletes reported difficulty sleeping at least eight of the past 30 days.

**WHAT** are recommendations for restorative sleep?

1. **Try to maintain a regular sleep schedule**, including on weekends. If this is not possible, establish a bedtime routine that can be practiced regularly.

2. **Seek bright light during the day**, especially in the morning, and try to **avoid bright and blue light at night**. This is especially important later at night, when bright and blue light can further delay sleep onset.

3. The bedroom should be cool (less than 68 degrees), dark and comfortable.

4. **Caffeine** (e.g., coffee, energy drinks and certain types of sodas and teas) **should be avoided at least six hours before bedtime**. Nicotine is also a stimulant and should be avoided. Alcohol may reduce time to fall asleep, but it can adversely impact sleep quality and should be avoided close to bedtime.

5. **Consumption of excessive food and liquids at night should be avoided**, as these may disrupt sleep.

6. **Avoid obsessive clock watching**. Often, looking at the clock at night can increase mental activity and anxiety, and make resuming sleep more difficult.

7. **Individuals who have difficulty falling asleep should generally avoid naps**. However, sleep-deprived individuals may find that short-duration napping during the day may improve performance and functioning.

8. **Beds should be used for sleep-related activities only**. Other activities such as reading and watching TV, especially if lying awake and unable to sleep, should be done out of the bed. Those who have difficulty falling asleep should get out of bed for a period of time and try again later. This practice (called stimulus control) is supported by strong evidence that it will help prevent insomnia and improve sleep quality over time.
What can institutions do to improve collegiate athlete sleep?

1. Consider learning more about athlete time demands by conducting an anonymous annual survey.
2. Consider incorporating sleep screening into the pre-participation exam.
   - The Athlete Sleep Screening Questionnaire\(^1\) and Athlete Sleep Behavior Questionnaire\(^2\) have been validated for use with athletes.
3. Provide education to athletes and coaches about sleep.
   - One example is for a sports medicine staff member or a licensed mental health provider to facilitate a team discussion, guided by the content on page 1 of this handout.

**STUDENT-ATHLETE REPORTED BARRIERS TO SLEEP**

- Time management
- Practice schedules
- Academic demands
- Social activities
- Work demands

These recommendations were the product of the NCAA’s Inter-association Task Force on Sleep and Wellness. More information about the consensus process and recommendations are provided in this article\(^3\).

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