

“Sweet Dreams are Made of These..”

In today's fast paced society, we often find ourselves running out of time constantly. A paradox of constantly rushing and never getting anything done, all at once. It's understandable then that sleep tends to take a backseat in modern society. Millennials seem to be the “sleepless generation”.

This is not a new revelation by any means. The philosophers of our time have already unpacked this from all angles in the form of countless internet memes. It seems that we are all only too aware of our own tiredness. Our required eight hours a day sleep quota seems to be a rather pricey one at this point. We seem to be constantly fatigued.

But here's the thing – there are some good arguments to be made that this is the best era for sleep in human history. Sleep in previous eras was rife with lots of disturbances including more risk of disease, less comfortable housing, more political strife. Today, we live in the safest, most comfortable era of human history. But we aren't sleepy enough. Why?

It seems that the comforts that have ensured that we get this comfortable sleep have also brought about some new entrapments.

Today, people are more stressed out than ever. Tossing and turning about the never-ending worries of a modern life seems to be enough to lose sleep over. The working environment today ensures you are constantly on the move. Globalisation has ensured that all corners of the world are connected and when people from opposite sides of the world talk, at least one of them misses out on sleep.

Smartphones and the prevalence of technology seems to be another factor. People today are reported to be letting more and more technology crawl into their night lives. There have been reports to indicate people use smartphones up to four hours before bed. “Just five more minutes” has evolved to “just one more e-mail”.

Culturally, it seems to be a badge of honour to go without sleep. You hear about people maximising productivity and sleeping on less hours a day. All-nighters have become the norm of the day for students. Sacrificing sleep is “part of the hustle”, part of what makes you stand apart from the crowd. Part of your dedication to your craft.

But, what about your dedication to your body?

As a society, we just don't seem to appreciate sleep. Operation on less sleep seems to be the sign of dedication. In society's rat race, sleep is often what ends up being compromised. Because you can always just coast on that extra cup of coffee. That extra pick me up. You can always pull just one more all-nighter. “I'll make it up over the weekend,” you lie.

There are numerous health benefits to sleep that we often don't discuss. Sleep not only makes you well rested and helps your psychological well-being, it increases your productivity. Sleep deprivation can elevate the stress that caused it in the first place. Deep sleep helps form linkages and memories and to crystallise new concepts (this is why it's important to get a good night's sleep before your big final). Sleeping is an opportunity for the body to rejuvenate itself, and repair itself. In rare circumstances, sleep deprivation can even lead to circumstances death. In diseases like fatal, familial insomnia, sleep becomes so unfamiliar to the body to the point of a person being unable to sleep.

The evolution of sleep to its current state is an interesting tale. We are the shortest sleeping primate, and this evolution seems to couple up well with our increased cognitive capacity. The fact that we as a species started evolving to sleep deeper and deeper helps make those important neural

connections that are key to memory and learning. Our sleep has been designed – and has evolved – to be at it most efficient today. Yet, we continue to disregard it.

It's important that we stop seeing sleep as a simple productivity killing activity, and recognise that sleep can allow us to live our best lives. Sleep is not only the key to our longevity but also help us make the most of those years.

So, go ahead. Take that nap. You deserve it.