

# Five Minutes to Thrive: 23-27 Jul 18

## **Sleep: Quality over Quantity**

In a 2016 survey of 363 ISRW Airmen, over half of you (52%) reported not obtaining enough sleep at night, while 81% of you reported consuming caffeine on a daily basis specifically to cope with sleep deficits (shocking, I know...). While it's important to strive for about 7-9 hours of sleep per night (see the chart on the right), equally vital is the *quality* of our sleep.

We go through a cycle of sleep marked by 5 non-linear stages. Typically, we'll progress through the first two stages of light sleep, proceed to the next two stages of deep sleep, cycle back up through the two light sleep stages, and then (finally) hit REM sleep, where we experience the most significant physical restoration, memory consolidation, and dreams. However, if you're spending too much time in non-REM sleep, you miss out on these great benefits! So what can we do to maximize the quality and restorative nature of our sleep? Glad you asked...

- **Exercise!** Moderate- to high-intensity physical activity not only exhausts your body but also counteracts the impact of stress hormones. So get some modicum of exercise daily!
- **Standardize your sleep/wake times.** Our bodies run on a 28-hour, hormonally-mediated day/night cycle called the circadian rhythm, which tries to predict when we eat, exercise, and sleep. If your sleep schedule varies (i.e.  $\pm 30$  minutes) from your typical bedtime or waketime, your circadian rhythm will try to adjust, making it more difficult for you to fall asleep or wake up. Try to go to bed and awaken around the same time, every day, even on non-work days.
- **Create a “wind down” process before bed.** Ever drive your car 70mph and then try to slam it in to park? I do not recommend this—especially for your body! Begin slowing down your physical activity at least an hour before bedtime, and try to engage in relaxing activities to cue your body for sleep. Similarly, try to avoid exercising or eating within 2 hours of sleep.
- **Ditch the electronics.** The blue wavelength light emitted from the TV, tablet, or smartphone stimulates your reticular activating system, increasing concentration and alertness—the exact *opposite* of what we want for sleep! Try reading a book or talking with your partner, instead.
- **Minimize external stimuli.** Downplay light and sound to the extent possible. I recommend blackout curtains or a sleep mask to keep the bedroom dark, and a fan or subtle noisemaker to muffle outside sounds. But be careful with earplugs—please don't sleep through your alarm!
- **Use relaxation techniques to help you ease into sleep.** Visualize your happy place, where you're totally at peace; then do some deep, slow breathing to mimic deep sleep respiration.

