

Too many sleepless nights

BY JIM HALL

My Greek text climbs up onto my desk and stares into my ten pound eyes. I realize I have 34 new terms and endless grammar to know by Monday morning, but as I open the book's pages the words meld together, forming a huge ink stain that has become my attention span. I feel like I've been up since antiquity. I am not alone.

As students, we often have to make sacrifices of our marks simply because we are too exhausted from our commitments to perform at our peak. We work to eat while many of our friends get to party, and as a result, we tend to party when our bodies wish we'd just go to bed.

This pattern of abuse may also become a recurring problem known as insomnia.

"Between twenty and thirty percent of the general population complain of insomnia," said Dr. Margaret Rajda, of the Sleep Disorders Clinic at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre. "Insomnia is a symptom rather than an illness in itself. It can be compared to pain due to a broken leg or due to a bad cough.

"At least fifty percent of insomniacs have a mental disorder

caused by depression and anxiety," Rajda said.

Insomniacs may suffer from what is known as psychophysiological insomnia. In this

proper night's sleep for the average person is impossible, Rajda says. Many people are well serviced after as few as six hours of sleep an evening, and many people need

"I would not encourage anyone to artificially reduce their sleep," Rajda warns. "[An individual's sleeping need] is mostly genetic. Instead of trying to re-organize their sleep, insomniacs should re-organize their schedule."

"Students who do not get enough sleep at night will experience cognitive defects," Rajda said. "It has been proven that the occurrence of alertness accidents increases with the lack of sleep."

The human body is designed to function during daylight hours and to maintain a regular schedule. Work, party, or study at night causes a disruption in the body's natural rhythm.

Insomniacs should avoid substances that may also disrupt our sleeping pattern such as caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.

"People may say [alcohol] actually helps them sleep, and it does initially," said Rajda. "But they will actually be seeing their sleep fragmented over days."

Rajda also warns against the use of sleeping pills. She says they are temporary solutions that do not attack the root of the problem.

"Some medication will produce tolerance, and some dependence," Rajda said. "If you have a broken leg you don't take Tylenol, you get your leg set."

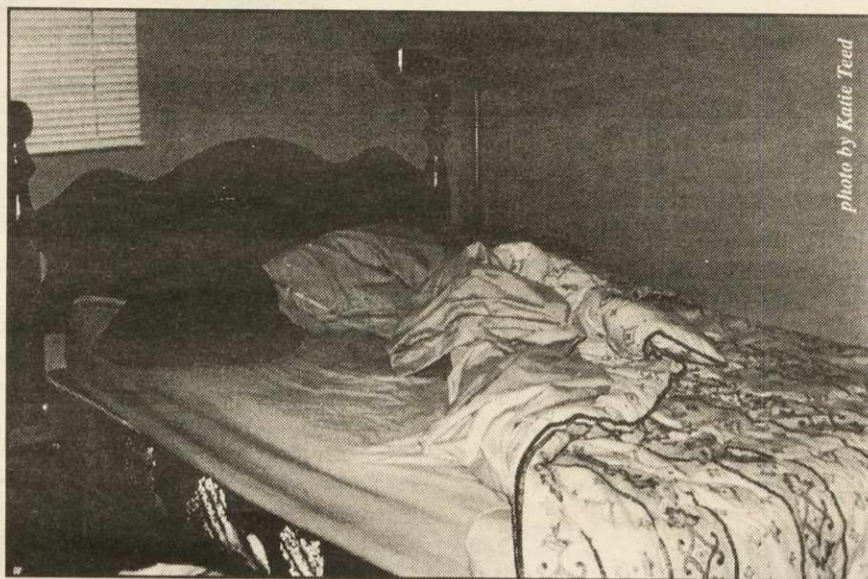


photo by Katie Teed

While most insomniacs own beds, they often have little use for them.

case, the patient conditions himself or herself unconsciously not to sleep. Often times when sufferers of these conditions try to go to sleep they are so worried they won't be able to fall asleep that they build exuberant amounts of somatic tension.

"It becomes a self fulfilling prophecy," Rajda said.

Generalizing the length of a

more than ten hours of sleep a night. Rajda advises that the amount of sleep that is necessary to keep a person feeling primed is "highly individualistic" to that person's physiology.

Likewise the amount of sleep our body needs cannot be supplemented by other stimuli, such as a little extra exercise or coffee in the early morning.

Fun with science

BY CHRISTINE PRESTON

Science majors — do you remember the days before you were sweating it in a lab, trying to crystallize an organic molecule or discover the genetic code of a fruit fly?

The Adventures in Science program is offering science students the opportunity to help children aged 7-12 become interested in science and technology. The program needs volunteers to participate in workshops for Sparks, Brownies, Beavers, Cubs, Girl Guides and Scouts in the metro Halifax area.

This year's theme is the body's senses, as well as a workshop on digestion for Girl Guides. The activities are hands on and prepared in advance by the program's co-ordinators. The activities are usually about two hours long and are on weeknights.

Many of the workshops are held in the Halifax area and students can arrange volunteer times around their schedule.

Students can participate in the program a few times a year or once a week depending on the time they have available.

"This is a really good opportunity for students who are interested in an educational science outreach," said Karen Rockwell, the Adventures in Science co-ordinator. "The kids get very excited about the activities."

The program begins in November and continues until March, excluding the month of December. During the week of Oct. 19 there will be training sessions for interested students.

For more information you can contact the Adventures in Science office at 494-6751, or visit room 4609 in the Centre for Marine Geology.



CUP Graphic: Jayson Silver

Note: The Dalhousie Gazette disclaims all liability in the use of coathangers as anti-depressants. This is a suggestion only, and not a good one at that.

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