Can't study late at night? [1]

Dear Alice,

My problem is this: whenever I have to study late at night, or do anything late at night, I usually have trouble (a lot of trouble) concentrating on whatever it is that I have to do. I'm not going to try anything like No-Doz, but when I drink coffee or anything with caffeine, it just knocks me out even faster. I can't believe it? it's like caffeine's some kind of sleeping potion for me. Some of my friends say eating while you work can help you stay up. I tried that, too. Didn't work. Any suggestions? Or am I just better off sleeping and leaving the work 'till the next day?

?Sleepy

Answer

Dear Sleepy,

To get the most out of your day, sleep should certainly be at the top of your ?To Do? list. Getting enough sleep is imperative for your ability to focus and absorb information. It seems that you already have a sense of when you're most productive. If you?re feeling groggy during late night study sessions, listen to your body ? you?ll be able to tell when it is time to simply close the books and hit the sack. Instead of cramming in the wee-hours of the night, you may want to schedule your work during a time when you are well-rested.

While no one can live without sleep, every person?s sleep needs are unique. Most healthy adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep per night, but your sleep needs may fall outside this range. A sleep diary can help you track your sleep habits over a one- or two-week period. For example, in the last few weeks, have you been waking feeling rested? When are you most productive?

You also mentioned that caffeine does not seem to help you stay awake. Certain studies suggest that it is possible to be immune to the effects of caffeine ? so you may be right! Also, be careful when using caffeine. It is easy to build a tolerance, which means you would need more and more coffee to get the desired effects.

Instead of relying on caffeine [2] or other supplements to get your work done, how about improving your prioritization and time management skills? Planning your day more efficiently can help you improve your study skills (and help you avoid hitting the snooze button multiple times). These tips may help you manage your responsibilities:
• **Break up your work into smaller bites.** Think about your typical day or week, and try to block out both study time and breaks. When planning your time, keep in mind how long you can usually focus.

• **Prioritize.** It can be helpful to try to tackle the most difficult things first, since this is when you'll have the most energy. Remember, making that first step (however small) is important to completing an assignment efficiently.

• **Postpone unnecessary activities until your work is done.** Let’s face it? there are plenty of other things you?d rather be doing than finishing your term paper. However, it is important to avoid all distractions until you are finished with your tasks.

• **Dedicate study spaces.** Having a dedicated study space (that's not your bed!) can be helpful in getting you to focus. You can even silence your cell phone and commit to a space that is free of distraction and noise.

• **Review your assignments, notes, and calendar every week.** Using a calendar will allow you to visualize when your most hectic weeks are. By planning in advance, you can begin certain assignments earlier than you normally would, plus leave ample time for completing tasks.

When push comes to shove, sometimes you just can’t accomplish everything without an all-nighter. To get the most out of your late-night study session, you can check out [All night, done right: Getting the most out of an all-nighter](#).

Unlike the research you did for that 20-page term paper, healthy habits are tools you will use every day for the rest of your life. Wishing you balance, efficiency, and ZzZs,

Alice!

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