Can't wake up in the winter [1]

Alice,

I have always been a poor "getter-upper" in the mornings, but lately I haven't even awakened when the alarm goes off. I just sleep right through it and wake up at around noon. I have been missing classes regularly and it's very distressing! I haven't been going to bed any later (I go to sleep at around 2:30 or 3 AM and have since the beginning of school and I used to wake up at around ten for my class). I haven't been eating or exercising differently. Could this be a result of the shift in weather or in the clocks? Does it take time for the body to adjust to the new season?

?Sleepyhead

Answer

Dear Sleepyhead,

Many people find it difficult to leave their comfy warm beds on a frigid winter morning, especially if it's still dark out when you're waking. People's bodies do change with the seasons, and just like many animals, people can be sleepier and lazier in the winter. It's possible that you're able to operate on a 3:00 am to 10:00 am sleep schedule in the summer, but in winter months your body may require something different. Have you observed any other changes in your routine? Or, is there something stressful in your life that may be impacting you (consciously or unconsciously)?

Here's the skinny on sleep. Everyone has a sleep-wake cycle that corresponds to his or her optimum degree of physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Sleep researchers believe that the majority of Americans are sleeping 60 to 90 minutes a night less than the seven, eight, or nine hours that would leave them refreshed and energetic during the day. In our culture, sleep is often considered expendable. In fact, not sleeping much is considered a sign of ambition and drive. But the truth is that adequate sleep enhances attentiveness, concentration, mood, and motivation.

If over-sleeping is causing you to regularly miss class, it might be worth trying to hit the hay a few hours earlier to see if that helps you rise on time. While it's often hard to create a new pattern in behavior, an earlier bedtime might just do the trick. These suggestions might be helpful in creating new sleeping habits:

- Establish a regular sleep time. Try going to sleep the same time each night, and waking
up the same time each day, within an hour, more or less. Make an effort to keep the same sleep times on the weekends in order to set your body’s rhythm.

- Create a supportive personal sleep environment? dark, quiet, free of distractions, and not too warm.
- Give yourself time to wind down before going to bed. This gives you a transition from your energetic life to sleeping.
- Exercise regularly? twenty to thirty minutes, three or four times a week? it can enhance your ability to sleep.

Another element of your quandary could be Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a syndrome which can mimic depression during the winter months. In individuals affected by SAD, the lack of sunlight in winter disturbs the neurotransmitter systems and can cause the need for a lot of sleep and difficulty waking up. Other symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite.
- Insomnia.
- Loss of interest in sex.
- Withdrawal from social contacts.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Focusing on negative thoughts and the bad things in life.

SAD is often helped by increased exposure to stronger-than-normal indoor lighting, vitamin D supplements, or relocation to more southern latitudes (not an option for everyone, of course). If you think you might be suffering from SAD, you may want to see a counselor or medical provider in order to figure out a treatment plan right for you.

Continue to sleep well, Sleepyhead, and hopefully some of the suggestions here can help you to rise well too.

Alice!

Category:
- Emotional Health [2]
- Blues & Depression [3]

Related questions

Does eating fat keep the body warm in winter? [4]
Sleeping too much [5]
Vegetarian ? Can't wake up in the morning [6]
Snoozing and losing [7]
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Resources

- a!Sleep website [9]
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [10]
- Mental Health Service (CUMC) [11]

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