Sleep is one of those things that you can’t really appreciate until you don’t have it. Anyone who has experienced sleep deprivation for long periods of time can tell you that it impacts your whole demeanor. You get snappy and aggravated, cry inexplicably, or lose it over the most minor details. It can also exacerbate the symptoms you might experience if you are already coping with anxiety or depression. It is one of the first suggestions we make when trying to focus on healthy habits and making positive changes—get some sleep!

So here are the recommendations from the National Sleep Foundation—now, we recognize that they don’t necessarily coincide with your stereotypical college lifestyle. But there are pieces, which when really prioritized and included in your daily routine, can make a huge difference!

- Avoid napping during the day; it can disturb the normal pattern of sleep and wakefulness.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol too close to bedtime. While alcohol is well known to speed the onset of sleep, it disrupts sleep in the second half as the body begins to metabolize the alcohol, causing arousal.
- Exercise can promote good sleep. Vigorous exercise should be taken in the morning or late afternoon. A relaxing exercise, like yoga, can be done before bed to help initiate a restful night’s sleep.
- Food can be disruptive right before sleep; stay away from large meals close to bedtime. Also dietary changes can cause sleep problems, if someone is struggling with a sleep problem, it’s not a good time to start experimenting with spicy dishes. And, remember, chocolate has caffeine.
- Ensure adequate exposure to natural light. This is particularly important for older people who may not venture outside as frequently as children and adults. Light exposure helps maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine. Try to avoid emotionally upsetting conversations and activities before trying to go to sleep. Don’t dwell on, or bring your problems to bed.
- Associate your bed with sleep. It’s not a good idea to use your bed to watch TV, listen to the radio, or read.
- Make sure that the sleep environment is pleasant and relaxing. The bed should be comfortable, the room should not be too hot or cold, or too bright.

Pretty challenging, right? But we think some of those changes can be done! Like….

- Try not to get your schedule too far off on the weekends, so that when your 8 am class comes around on Monday, you don’t have to readjust after sleeping in all weekend.
- Get some lamps or fun strings of lights to decorate your room so you don’t have to use the fluorescent overhead light.
- Create a regular bedtime routine and stick with it. Listening to relaxing music, using a nature sound machine or reading a novel can help ease into sleep mode. We even have a number of free app downloads for music and nature sounds on our website under the Self Help tab. One of my favorites is Relax Melodies, where you can actually layer several sounds to create your own unique mix.
- Try to set a cut-off point for caffeine during the day. Yes, Starbucks does make decaf!
- Get your work out in early, in order to avoid the stimulating endorphins from exercise too late in the evening. Yes, working out is important, but maybe not starting it at midnight…