

SLEEP STRATEGIES FOR THE ADOLESCENT ATHLETE

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS & SUMMARY

Athletes seem to be more at risk for sleep disturbances and are uniquely impacted by poor sleep. Fortunately, there are strategies that can be implemented to improve sleep in athletes. In this SSE article we focused on 5 different strategies:

Frequently educate athletes about the importance of sleep

1

Understand the true basics of sleep are key:



To help facilitate positive sleep behavior change, frequently check in with your athletes to reinforce how good sleep benefits performance, recovery, and normal adolescent physical growth and development.

Screen athletes for significant sleep problems

2



Prior research has found that clinically relevant sleep disturbances can occur in ~25% of athletes.



Utilize a questionnaire validated in athletes (e.g. Athlete Sleep Screening questionnaire) to accurately identify athletes that need support.

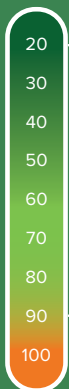


The sleep screening should take place during the pre- or post-season since interventions for sleep disorders may require further sleep testing and treatment.

Encourage napping in athletes by providing opportunities

3

Napping can help athletes recover from poor sleep and provide performance benefits. Avoid napping too close to bedtime to facilitate good nighttime sleep.

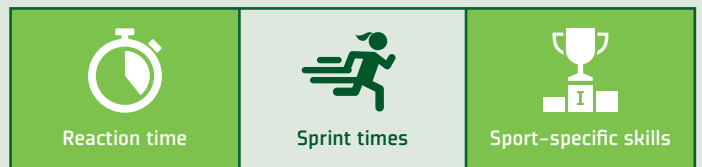


Naps between 20 and 90 min taken in the afternoon are beneficial and minimize negative impacts on sleep that night.

Bank sleep for better performance

4

Multiple nights of adequate sleep and napping, if possible, in advance of an important event or an anticipated period of sleep deprivation may improve:



Literature is mixed on the amount of time necessary to bank sleep. Some studies reported benefits of weeks of sleep banking and some reported benefits from just one day.



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SLEEP STRATEGIES



Reduce evening light exposure

Exposure to bright light can suppress melatonin secretion and make it more difficult to fall asleep.

- ▶ Wear blue light blocking amber glasses
- ▶ Use light-reducing smartphone applications
- ▶ Get more light earlier in the day to counter bright light in the evening

Implement a good pre-sleep routine about an hour before bedtime

A consistent pre-sleep routine can help prepare the mind for sleep.

- ▶ Put away electronic devices and pick up a paper book
- ▶ Stretch
- ▶ Take a warm bath
- ▶ Write a to do list
- ▶ Implement the cognitive shuffle



Keep the sleep environment cave-like

- ▶ Turn off or cover light sources and use blackout curtains
- ▶ Wear ear plugs
- ▶ Use a white noise machine
- ▶ Keep temperature cool, between 61-68° F (16-20° C)

Be strategic about using caffeine and supplements

Caffeine may offer performance benefits but also has a half life of 4-6 hours, which may negatively impact sleep.

- ▶ Be strategic about timing of caffeine intake
- ▶ Be aware of how caffeine impacts individual athletes

Supplements that may improve sleep quality: Tart Cherry juice, possible Magnesium



Lambing KA, Bender AM. (2022) A Practitioner's Guide to Improving Sleep in Athletes. Sports Science Exchange. 35(233):1-6.

