



reCAPS

**Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz**

CAPS Staff Share Our Own Tips for Getting Better Sleep

Having trouble falling or staying asleep is one of the most common health issues in the United States. Recent studies show that about 20% of Americans get 6 or fewer hours per night, when 7 to 8 hours is the recommended amount of sleep for adults.

Sleep issues may be caused by stress, anxiety, depression, medical issues, poor sleep sched-

ule, unrestful sleeping environment, and over-use of computer screens, which can stimulate alertness in the brain.

Although mental health professionals know a lot about healthy sleep habits (“sleep hygiene”), we’re not immune to sleep issues. Many of us have spent time lying awake or tossing and turning through the night. I asked some of

my colleagues at CAPS for tips on what has helped them get a better night’s sleep. Here’s what they had to say.

From therapist Alana Jacobs: “A few things I do are to keep my phone charging in a different room to avoid waking up to stressful emails or texts, using a sound machine to block out noise and so I associate bedtime with the sounds of the machine, turning down the lights before I get in bed to give myself some winding-down time, and creating a bedtime ritual: I like to light a candle (and of course, I blow it out before I go to sleep to avoid a fire hazard). The candle ritual is comforting and soothing and cues me that it’s time to sleep soon.”

According to therapist Amy Mandell, “I’ve tried a lot of sleep hygiene tips over the years and have found a combination of winding-down



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All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let’s Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual, couples, and family counseling
- Medication services
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon–Fri 8 am–5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!

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Dear CAPS,

How much does the weather play a role in my mental health?

—*Nature's Child*

Studies show that when it comes to mental and emotional health, the amount of time between sunrise and sunset is the weather variable that matters most. This is true for just about everyone, not just those who get Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of depression that occurs in winter. Surprisingly, other aspects of weather and environment, such as temperature, rain, and smog, don't seem to have much impact on mental health.

There are several reasons for daylight impacting our mental health. First, vitamin D (which our bodies produce when we get sunlight) is a key factor in helping prevent and alleviate depressive symptoms. Our bodies need about 20 to 30 minutes a day of sun exposure (without sunscreen) several times a week to produce healthy levels of D.

Sunlight also triggers our brain to release serotonin. This is a neurotransmitter that is directly linked with mood and energy.

Finally, the sun affects our circadian rhythm, the internal system that

controls our sleep and wake patterns, and getting adequate sleep is related to good mental health.

This time of year, it's generally easy to get a few minutes of sunshine a day. But, what should you do during the winter, when days are shorter and darker? A few tips include being outside during daylight, even if there is not much direct sun; increasing vitamin D intake through foods (e.g., salmon, egg yolks) and supplements or cod liver oil; getting more exercise (especially outside); and purchasing a light therapy device if you get severe SAD.



Photo by Abdul Hassan.

Peer-Led Workshops for Spring Quarter

Invite us! You can schedule a workshop for your student org, residence hall, or class with CAPS' trained Peer Educators!

The CAPS Peer Education Program (PEP) offers three different workshops to the UCSC community during Weeks 1 through 9:

Stress Less

This workshop teaches you new ways to manage stress and feel better. It's a 90-minute, relaxing, interactive, resource-filled experience designed to help you identify areas of stress and make a



plan for immediate (and long-term) stress relief. Our Peer Educators are well trained in stress-management techniques, tips, and strategies, and they look forward

to sharing their experience and knowledge with you.

Overcoming Test Anxiety

This workshop provides tech-

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strategies and other tools work best for me. One or two hours before bed, I stop using any screens like my phone or TV, I read a low-stress book while relaxing, and I refrain from thinking or talking about stressful things or responsibilities. I also use blue-blocking glasses when reading to limit my exposure to blue light. Blue light inhibits the natural hormone melatonin, which is responsible for inducing sleepiness. I look a little like a construction worker, and my wife makes fun of me, but it works, so I don't care!"

Therapist Jaclyn Donegan says, "I've followed the obvious suggestions, such as no screen time an hour before bed, blackout curtains for near total darkness, and relaxation techniques for when I'm particularly anxious or restless. However, the number one thing that has helped me sleep (and I've struggled big time with insomnia) is getting rid of my alarm clock. This has helped me in two ways. One, it got rid of unwanted light right by my face. And two, if I do wake at night, I'm not lying there looking at the clock and calculating how much sleep I'm not getting. I use my phone as an alarm and don't look at it if I wake up in the night. It's been a huge help!"

Case manager Christine Merri-man says, "If I am being kept awake by worrisome thoughts, I tend to read using yellow light

("night shift" mode on Apple devices) until my eyes get tired, or I'll play crossword-type games that engage and fatigue my brain. I also take a good-quality valerian root supplement most nights about half an hour before bedtime. Or, infrequently, I'll take a Benadryl if I also have allergies. If I am needing to settle down physically, while lying down, I'll take deep, slow breaths with one hand on my abdomen and the other over my heart, or I'll listen to a guided meditation (I like Deepak Chopra, as his voice is soothing). In the middle of the night if I wake up, I'll take a kava kava supplement to help me relax. I also make sure to keep the lights dim and my eyes partly closed to avoid feeling more awake. Keeping my bedroom cooler also helps me sleep."

Upcoming Events

LET'S TALK: A drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential, one-time chat with a professional CAPS counselor. No appointment needed! Let's Talk is held four times a week from 1 to 3 pm at different locations in fall, winter, and spring, except holidays and finals weeks. All registered undergrad and grad UCSC students are welcome at all locations of Let's Talk. For more info, visit our [website](#) or call (831) 459-2628.

PARENT-STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP: A supportive environment for those struggling with the unique challenges of parenting while being a student. Children up to age 1 year welcome with parent. Meeting three Mondays (4/15, 5/13, and 6/3) from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at Family Student Housing #712, Family Center. Call group facilitator, Susan Gulbe Walsh, Ph.D., at (831) 459-2377 for more info.

QUEER & QUESTIONING MEN DISCUSSION & SUPPORT GROUP: This weekly drop-in group provides a welcoming environment and support to discuss topics of interest brought up by group members. Mondays from 3:30 to 4:30 pm at the CAPS Central Office Group Room. Call group facilitator, Michael Richards, Ph.D., at (831) 459-1255 for more info.

TRANS, NON-BINARY, GENDERQUEER, & GENDER QUESTIONING STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP: This weekly drop-in group provides a welcoming environment and support to discuss topics of inter-

est brought up by group members. Wednesdays from 3:30 to 4:30 pm at the CAPS Central Office Group Room. Call group facilitator, Lain Lease, L.M.F.T., at (831) 459-1476 for more info.

BUILDING RESILIENCY: A walk-in group for undocumented and mixed-status students. An environment that provides a safe and confidential space to process topics of interest selected by students, offers support, and addresses the importance of self-care. Wednesdays 6:00 to 7:00 pm, EOP Conference Room, Academic Resources Center. Call group facilitator, Erica Lopez, L.M.F.T., at (831) 459-2572 for more info.

PSYCHIATRY 101 WORKSHOPS: These one-time workshops, offered several times a quarter, provide information about medications for mental health issues and psychiatry resources on and off campus. Sign-up and referral by a therapist or medical doctor are required. For more info, visit our [website](#) or call (831) 459-2628.

ANXIETY TOOLBOX: This three-part workshop series gives you information and coping tools for managing anxiety and stress. Meets for three hour-long sessions that build on each other and offered at multiple times throughout the quarter. Check our [website](#) to learn more and see the schedule, or call for more info at (831) 459-2628.

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niques for managing and preventing test anxiety! This peer-led workshop is designed to help you learn skills and build awareness of factors contributing to test anxiety.

How to Support a Friend

Almost everyone knows someone who is having a hard time, but we don't always know how to help. If you feel unprepared or worried about "saying the wrong thing," this workshop is for you! This is a peer-led workshop designed to

help you recognize common signs of depression and anxiety and teach you valuable skills, including when and how to refer someone to CAPS. So, take 90 minutes out of your day to learn what to say and do to be a better and more supportive friend.

Contact Information

To invite PEP to present one of these workshops to your group, please complete our online [Workshop Request Form](#).

