

Can Sleep Improve Your Athletic Performance?

Athletes spend a lot of money and effort trying to rack up every possible advantage before a competition -- from tubs of protein powder, to \$100 compression shorts, to amino acid smoothies. Want a simpler and cheaper way? Go to bed an hour early.

"Getting enough sleep is crucial for athletic performance," says David Geier, MD, director of Sports Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina. Studies have found that good sleep can improve speed, accuracy, and reaction time in athletes.

Whether you're an Olympic athlete, a weekend warrior, or a lunch-break walker, getting enough sleep is key for a lot of reasons. Here's why sleep is important -- along with some tips on how to get more of it.

How Much Sleep Do Athletes Need?

According to the National Sleep Foundation, most people need about seven to nine hours of sleep a night. If you're an athlete in training, that may not be enough.

"Just as athletes need more calories than most people when they're in training, they need more sleep, too," says Geier. All the stress and grueling practices require more time to recover.

Jim Thornton, president-elect of the National Athletic Trainers' Association, recommends that an athlete in training should sleep about an hour extra. Some athletes manage this with an earlier bedtime. An afternoon nap can help, too, Thornton says.

How Sleep Affects Athletic Performance

Most athletes -- and people in general -- underestimate the importance of sleep, experts say.

"Not getting enough sleep doesn't only make you tired the next day," says Geier. "It has a big impact on what's happening inside your body."

Felicia Stoler, RD, an exercise physiologist and registered dietitian in New Jersey, agrees. "Sleep is the time when your body repairs itself," she tells WebMD. "If we don't get enough sleep, we don't perform well."

So what does sleep deprivation do to your game?

- **Decreased energy.** Sleep deprivation reduces your body's ability to store glycogen -- energy that you need during endurance events.
- **Worse decision making and reflexes.** Studies have shown that athletes who don't get enough sleep are worse at making split-second decisions and less accurate.
- **Hormone changes.** Not getting enough sleep can increase levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that can slow down healing, increase the risk of injuries, and worsen memory. It also lowers levels of growth hormone that helps repair the body.

On the flip side, studies have found clear evidence that increasing sleep has real benefits for athletes.

A 2011 study tracked the Stanford University basketball team for several months. Players added an average of almost two hours of sleep a night. The results: Players increased their speed by 5%. Their free throws were 9% more accurate. They had faster reflexes and felt happier. Other studies have shown similar benefits for football players and other athletes.
Sleep Tips for Athletes

Getting enough sleep is easier said than done -- especially for athletes.

"I suspect that sleep problems in athletes are more common than we think," says Geier. A lot of things can get in the way of their sleep – travel for away games, practices early in the morning or games late in the evening, and the stress that athletes may feel before a competition.

Here are four ways athletes can improve their sleep.

1. **Get on a regular schedule.** Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
2. **When you travel, give yourself time to acclimate.** If you're traveling for an athletic competition, it's a good idea to get there a few days early – or even weeks – Stoler says. That way, your body can adjust and you have time to get on a normal sleep schedule.
3. **Avoid sleep medication.** "Unless a doctor has prescribed it, don't take any sleep medications," says Thornton. Over-the-counter sleep aids are likely to disturb the quality of your sleep and your performance the next day. Relying on natural relaxation techniques before bed – such as deep breathing – is a better approach, he says.
4. **Reduce alcohol and caffeine.** "Two or three days before a competition, start cutting back on caffeine and alcohol," Geier says. "You want to avoid anything that could disrupt your sleep." Remember that even when you're not in training, sleep should still be a priority. Getting enough sleep doesn't only help with athletic performance. It can do so much more – increasing your resistance to colds, reducing pain, improving your memory, and helping you lose weight. No wonder drug has more benefits – for your game or your life – than an extra hour of sleep.

Want to know your metabolic power? [Click Here](#) to find out if your metabolism is working for you or against you.

Do you know someone who might be interested in our products or services? [Click Here](#) to fill out our referral form and, as our way of saying thank you, you will receive \$15 off and of our products or services. We appreciate your support.

[Click Here](#) to sign-up for our e-mail list so can receive all of our articles & download your free copy of our Dietary Information e-book.

[Like us on Facebook](#)/[Connect with us on LinkedIn](#)/[Follow us on Twitter](#)

[Follow us on Google+ / Pinterest](#)

(Hold down the Ctrl key & click the underlined words or logos)

Make sure to forward to friends and followers.



Connect with me at [Wizpert](#)