

Pulling an All-Nighter: How it Affects Sleep



College kids cramming for a test, stressed-out workers trying to hit deadlines and sleep-deprived parents who walk the halls with their colicky child often pull what's known as "all-nighters."

While they may enable a person to get a lot of work done, those dreaded nights spent without restorative zzz's can do more than lead to dark circles and bags under your eyes: Sleep experts say one all-nighter can mess with your ability to get a good night's sleep for days to come.

Many think they can "catch up" on sleep and don't realize the damaging effect an all-nighter has on their circadian rhythm, said Dr. John Salerno of [The Salerno Center](#) in New York.

When you have a positive and healthy sleep pattern, also called a [circadian rhythm](#), your body knows when it's time for bed and begins in anticipation of restorative sleep.

"But lack of sleep throws your body off from its daily routine, which makes it more difficult to readjust to your normal bedtime schedule the next day," Salerno said. "All-nighters and late nights alter your pattern and therefore affect your sleep schedule, making you drowsy for several days to come."

An all-nighter also can put your overall health at risk.

Staying up all night alters your body's production of naturally occurring hormones. [Lack of sleep increases production of ghrelin and reduces production of leptin](#). "That imbalance of hormones can cause weight gain," Salerno said. "Sleepless nights can also damage the digestive system because all-nighters alter the way your body filters glucose. That could ultimately lead to long-term health effects such as diabetes or kidney failure."

If you do stay up all night, don't expect to catch up on your lost sleep all at once.

Salerno noted it takes your body a few days, possibly a week, to get your sleep schedule back on track. "The best way to overcome an all-nighter or sleepless night is to follow a consistent sleep routine until you are back to your normal pattern."

That means giving yourself a bedtime and sticking to it.

"Your circadian rhythm is an important factor in the health of your sleep, so make sure your bedtime is consistent on a daily basis," Salerno said.