

YOUR GOOD HEALTH

Skipping sleep

Experts say we need 8 hours of sleep, but many thrive on half

By Emily Tate

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When he was in high school, Mauricio Bustamante decided sleeping was a poor use of his time and, quite frankly, was rather boring.

So one day, he simply cut his nightly sleep in half, and he's never looked back.

"I just don't like to sleep very much," said Bustamante, now a 33-year-old postdoctoral researcher at Ohio State University. "I find the nights to be peaceful."

He sleeps four to five hours each night, a routine he says he plans to keep up indefinitely.

Bustamante makes it sound easy, but most of us need at least seven or eight hours of sleep each night, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Anything less and you will start to notice negative side effects, said Eric Mintz, a sleep expert at Kent State University. They include irritability, decreased motor function and an inability to concentrate, he said.

"In our society, we can beat back some of that temporarily — usually with caffeine — but that can only work so long," he said.

Mintz said Bustamante is among the less than 1 percent of the population that can function on little sleep.

Though it's unclear exactly how some people can thrive on minimal sleep, experts say it likely is caused by a genetic variation.

"These people are very, very uncommon," said Ulysses Magalang, director of the sleep medicine program at Ohio State's Wexner Medical Center. "They are extreme outliers, but it's likely on the basis of inherited genes."

Mintz said people who carry those genes essentially are better at sleeping than the rest of us.

"It's almost like their sleep is more efficient, so they don't need as much of it," he said. "And because they don't need as much sleep to feel good, they tend to accomplish things most people couldn't."

Bustamante was raised in Peru and moved to Columbus two years ago to research astrophysics at the Center of Cosmology and AstroParticle Physics at Ohio State. He works about 12 hours a day making sense of the experimental data collected by particle or astrophysical detectors.

At home, he reads and watches movies — a lot of books and a lot of movies,



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he said.

While Bustamante lives this way by choice, some live without sleep because they have to.

Scott Dickson is director of event services at the Schottenstein Center, which hosts concerts, speakers and sporting events. When event season picks up in the fall, he sometimes works more than 100 hours a week.

The 52-year-old said his body eventually adjusted to the demands of his job. Now, he rarely sleeps more than six hours a night, even when he could. And during the busiest days, he will try to sneak in half-hour naps when possible.

"People say, 'You need more sleep,' but that's just the way I function," Dickson said. "I always feel like if I'm sleeping, I'm missing out on something."

What helps him maintain such little sleep?

"Adrenaline is key," he said. "There are things I'm responsible for that still put butterflies in my stomach."

— Emily Tate writes for The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch and can be reached at etate@dispatch.com



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