Prevention is Balanced, Comprehensive, Evidence-Based, Evaluated, and a Shared Responsibility

Partners in Prevention

Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium

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Sleeping Through College: How Well Are Missouri Students Really Resting

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies, including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. This brief includes data for the 23 4-year institutions in the coalition; 2-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their data is not included in this statewide aggregate. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health play in student health and wellness. This brief will focus on data related to the substance use, mental health, and sleep behaviors of college students collected from the 2025 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (sample size, N = 5,634).

Introduction

Sleep, especially quality sleep, is crucial for people of all ages, but especially among college students. Despite its importance, many college students do not get an adequate amount of sleep each night, which can lead to significant impairments in academic performance, cognitive function, and mental health. Here, we will explore why good sleep is important, as well as a review of the 2025 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey data's sleep-related variables.

The Importance of Good Sleep

The term 'good sleep' typically encompasses two key components: sleep quality and sleep duration. Sleep quality includes factors like ease of falling asleep, sleep continuity, and waking feeling rested, while sleep duration refers to how long a person sleeps each night. According to health experts, young adults should aim for a minimum of seven hours of sleep nightly.[1]

The need for good sleep is extensive and well-documented, and includes substantial benefits both physical and mental and cognitive health[2, 3]:

Physical Health:

- Supports immune system function and reduces inflammation.
- Regulates blood pressure, heart rate, and cardiovascular health.
- Aids in metabolism, hormone regulation, and blood sugar control.
- Helps prevent chronic conditions, such as diabetes and obesity.

Mental and Cognitive Health:

- Improves memory, learning, and academic performance.
- Enhances focus, concentration, and decision-making.
- Promotes emotional regulation and mood stability.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression.

A Review of the MACHB Data

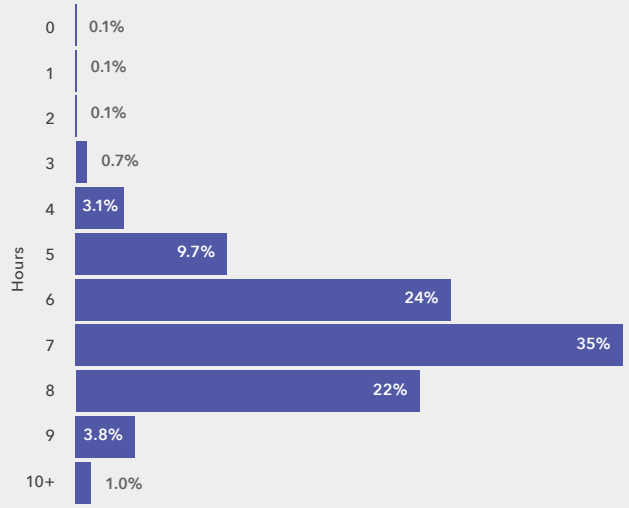
Data from the 2025 MACHB survey, which includes responses from over 5,000 four-year students across the state of Missouri, displays both encouraging trends and areas of potential concern.

Sleep Duration and Patterns

While 62 percent of students report getting at least seven hours of sleep per night, the recommended minimum, nearly 38 percent of students are sleeping less than the medically encouraged threshold. Alarmingly, ten percent of students report sleeping five hours or less on a typical school night. The most common sleep durations are:

- Seven hours (35 percent).
- Six hours (24 percent).
- Eight hours (22 percent).

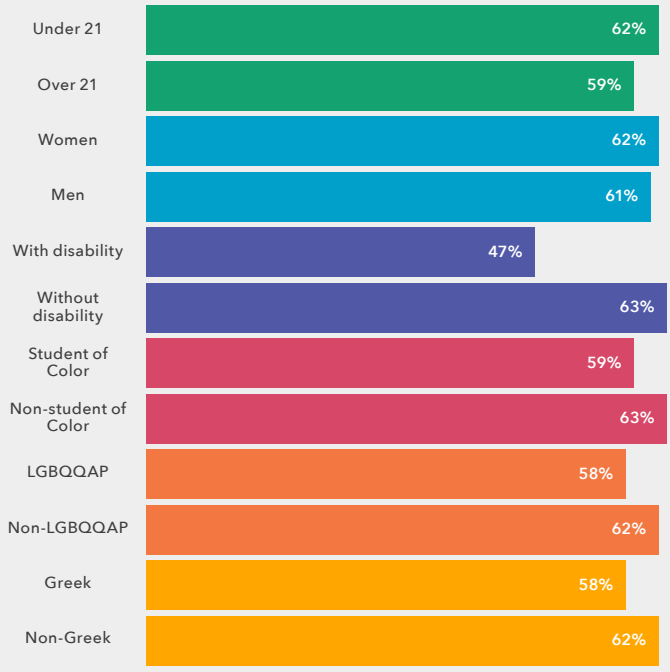
Chart 1: Number of Hours Slept on a Typical School Night



These sleep duration habits vary by demographic group:

- Students under age 21 are slightly more likely to get seven or more hours (62 percent) than those over 21 (59 percent).
- Women and men report similar rates (62 percent versus 61 percent).
- Students with disabilities are significantly less likely to get sufficient sleep (47 percent) than those without a disability (63 percent).
- Students of color (59 percent) and LGBQQAP students (58 percent) report lower rates of sufficient sleep than their peers (63 percent and 62 percent, respectively).
- Greek-affiliated students (58 percent) report slightly less adequate sleep than non-Greek students (62 percent).
- Students in the military (50 percent), student parents (51 percent), and first-generation students (55 percent) also show lower rates of seven or more hour sleep nights.

Chart 2: Students with Adequate Sleep by Sub-Demographics

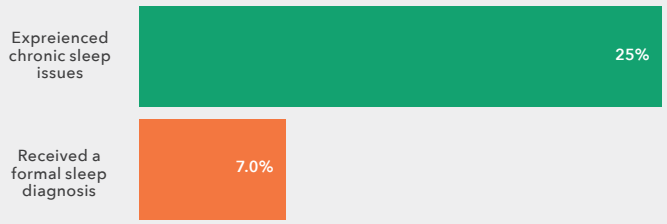


Chronic Sleep Issues and Student Perception

Chronic sleep issues are prevalent throughout the Missouri college student population:

- Twenty-five percent of students reported experiencing chronic sleep issues in the past year.
- Seven percent received a formal diagnosis (e.g., insomnia, narcolepsy, sleep apnea, etc.).

Chart 3: Self-Reported Sleep Problems and Diagnosis Rates



These sleep-related challenges are well-noted by students:

- 52 percent of respondents identified sleep as one of the most important issues facing college students today—an area where they feel more support from campus staff is needed.

The Sleep and Mental Health Connection

There is a strong correlation between sleep deprivation and mental health concerns:

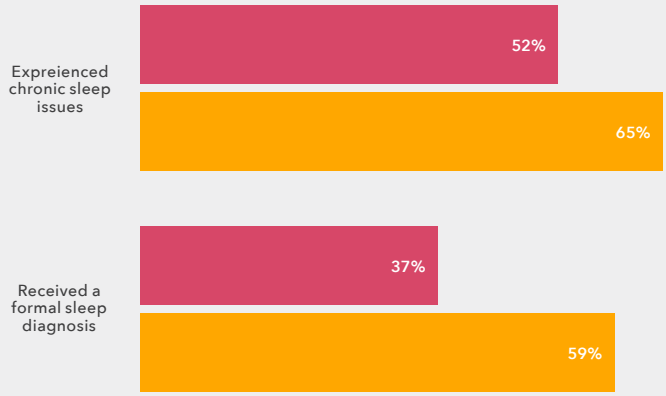
Among students who sleep fewer than seven hours, 52 percent report experiencing depressive symptoms, compared to 37 percent of those getting seven or more hours.

- Students who experienced depression in the past year are also significantly less likely to get seven or more hours of sleep each night (52 percent versus 62 percent overall).

65 percent of students who sleep under seven hours report anxiety symptoms, compared to 59 percent of those with adequate sleep.

- Similarly, those who experienced anxiety also report lower sleep rates (55 percent).

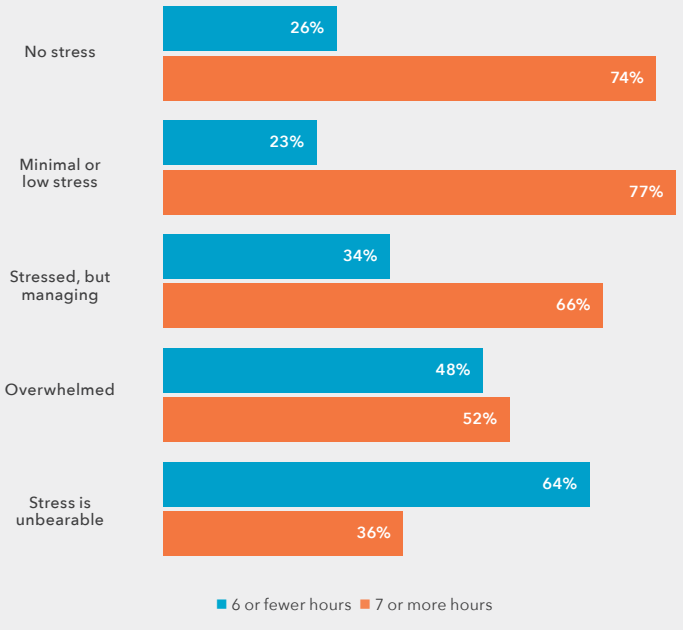
Chart 4: Mental Health by Sleep Duration



Stress

- Among students who describe their stress as "unbearable," 73 percent get six hours or less of sleep
- Fifty-nine percent of those feeling "overwhelmed" also reported shorter sleep duration.
- Conversely, students who report no or minimal stress are far more likely to attain recommended sleep levels, with 66 percent of students with "no stress" getting seven or more hours of sleep and 77 percent of those with "minimal or low stress" hitting that same benchmark.

Chart 5: Sleep Duration by Reported Stress Level (past two weeks)



Substance Use Behaviors and Sleep

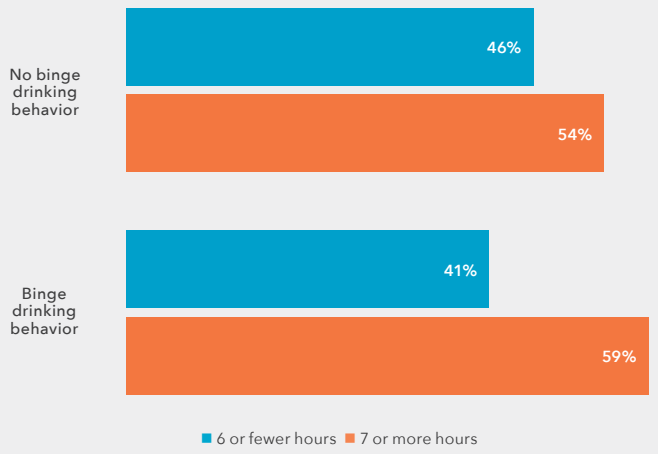
There are mixed results between sleep deprivation and certain substance use behaviors, specifically binge drinking and cannabis use.

Binge Drinking

Contrary to what some may expect, students who engage in binge drinking (five or more drinks within a two hour period for men, or four or more drinks for women) are slightly more likely to meet recommended sleep guidelines than those who do not, with 59 percent of binge drinkers reporting sufficient sleep compared to 54 percent of non-binge drinkers.

Potential explanations for this phenomenon include perceived versus actual sleep quality (binge drinkers may sleep longer, but their sleep quality is often poorer), alcohol's sedative effects, and differing lifestyle and academic pressures of binge versus non-binge drinkers.

Chart 6: Sleep Duration by Binge Drinking Behavior

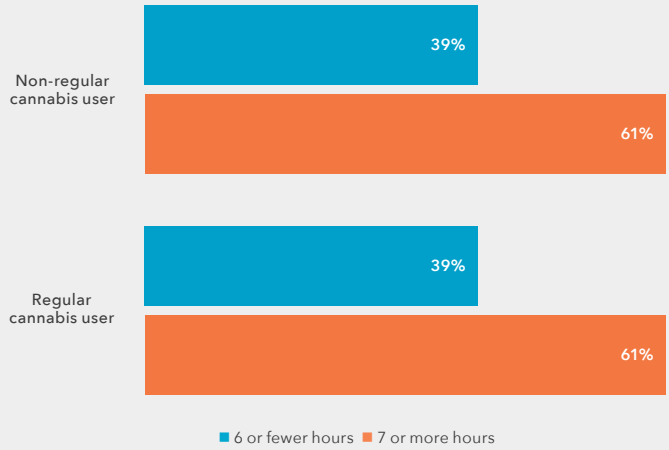


Regular Cannabis Use

In this sample, there was no meaningful difference in sleep duration between regular (consumed cannabis one to two times a month or more in the past year) and non-regular cannabis users. Approximately 39 percent of students in both groups reported getting six or fewer hours of sleep on school nights, while 61 percent reported getting seven or more hours. This suggests that regular cannabis use does not appear to significantly affect typical sleep duration in this population of Missouri college students.

Potential explanations for this lack of meaningful difference in sleep duration between regular and non-regular users include other confounding factors, such as academic stress and workload, irregular sleep schedules, use of other substances (e.g., caffeine, stimulants, etc.), and potential mental health conditions.

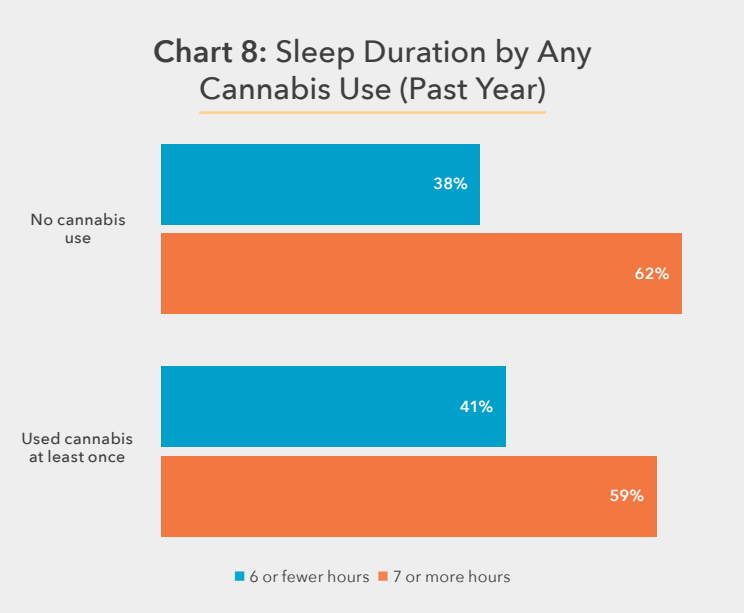
Chart 7: Sleep Duration by Regular Cannabis Use (Past Year)



Past-Year Cannabis Use

When comparing students who used cannabis in the past year to those who did not, a slight difference in sleep duration was observed: Students who reported any cannabis use in the past year were more likely to experience sleep deprivation, with 41 percent getting six or fewer hours of sleep on a typical school night, compared to 38 percent of those who had not used cannabis in the past year.

Potential explanations for the finding that occasional cannabis use may be associated with a slight increase in sleep deprivation include irregular use patterns (e.g., staying up late to use substances with friends), disrupted sleep architecture (e.g., reduction in REM sleep), and potentially a bidirectional relationship of cannabis use to cope with existing sleep problems.



Conclusion

The data from the 2025 MACHB stresses the critical role that sleep plays in the overall health and well-being of college students. While most students report getting a moderate amount of sleep, significant disparities exist across demographic groups, and a concerning amount still experience chronic sleep issues. These challenges are not only linked to academic performance and physical health but also show strong associations with mental health symptoms like depression and anxiety.

Contrary to expectations, binge drinkers are slightly more likely to report getting seven or more hours of sleep. However, this may reflect longer, but lower-quality, sleep, as alcohol disrupts restfulness. Cannabis patterns are similarly nuanced: regular use shows no clear impact on sleep duration, but past-year use is linked to slightly more sleep deprivation. These findings highlight the complex relationship between substance use and sleep, where more hours do not always mean better rest.

To better aid students, it is clear that improving sleep hygiene and promoting healthy sleep behaviors should be a priority in campus health initiatives and student support services.

For more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit **mopip.org/pip/research**.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report and data prepared using 2025 MACHB data by Gavin C. Newberry, Research Intern. Published August 2025.

References

1. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2022). How much sleep is enough? National Institutes of Health. https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep/how-much-sleep

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