



## **FACT SHEET SLEEP + PERFORMANCE**

From mental to emotional to physical health, quality sleep is the key to improved performance at work, in athletics, or in our daily lives in general. When gearing up for a season or big game, athletes are frequently told that diet and exercise should be the foundation of their training regimen. Yet, sleep is considered the “third pillar” of health and should be held to the same importance as diet and exercise. Quality sleep (7 to 8 hours each night) has many benefits for athletes as they train and practice to achieve peak performance. These benefits include:

- **Improved reaction times.** Studies show that athletes who get consistent inadequate sleep perform just as poorly on reaction time tests as a someone who is legally drunk.
  - A study by Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic and Research Laboratory published in SLEEP, showed that Stanford University basketball players were able to improve performance by increasing the amount of sleep they got each night.
- **Decreased injury rates.** Shorter sleep periods inhibit the body’s time to repair muscle and cells from the intensity of practices and games, leaving the body susceptible to injury.
- **Muscle growth and recovery.** Most of the benefits of exercise are realized during sleep. While sleeping, the body releases growth hormone, which helps promote muscle growth and recovery.
- **Everyday health and performance.** Research shows that after several nights of losing sleep the ability to function suffers as if a day’s worth of sleep has been lost, leading to decreased memory.
- **Improved learning ability.** During the 8 or so hours asleep, the brain processes new information picked up throughout the day and consolidates it. This consolidation process ensures that new information is sorted into the right place, making it easier to learn new things and retain them.
- **Enhanced ability to manage pain.** When one gets 7-8 hours of quality sleep, they are better able to manage pain, as the analgesic aspects of sleep can help to increase pain thresholds.
- **Improved endurance and on-field stamina.** When sleep deprived, athletes will become exhausted sooner because the body will attempt to conserve energy. This tiredness can lead to overtraining as athletes feel they aren’t seeing benefits from extra training, which occurs during deep sleep.
- **Decreased risk of catching the common cold, flu and other illnesses.** Quality sleep helps the body to recharge and maintain a strong immune system, decreasing the risk of getting various illnesses.
- **Improved mood and alertness.** Quality sleep on a consistent basis helps to improve our moods, making it easier to tackle daily tasks or training with alertness, attentiveness and efficiency.