

# SLEEP AT MIT: UNTIL YOU DO IT, IT SEEMS UNATTAINABLE

## Executive Summary

*I find that everything gets approximately a million times worse if I haven't slept... [when I get enough sleep] my mood and health have increased significantly, I'm doing better in my classes, I'm more willing to exercise... basically everything has improved. – MIT undergraduate student*

The cultures of college campuses across the nation, including MIT, often encourage sleep deprivation. Members of the MindHandHeart Wellness Working Group and MIT Medical set out to identify undergraduate and graduate students who prioritize self-care and achieve healthy sleep. Students with healthy sleep lifestyles experience benefits in health and academic performance, while only incurring manageable costs or challenges. Through in-depth focus group discussions with 'sleep enthusiasts', the group identified students' barriers to prioritizing sleep, as well as assets to achieve high-quality sleep. Recommendations suggest ways to make healthy sleep more accessible and to shift MIT culture to better value sleep and self-care.

### SLEEP BARRIERS

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- Acclimating to MIT (freshmen and graduate students)
- Social pressure and belonging
- Academic deadlines and collaboration
- Life skills and self-regulation
- Living environments

### SLEEP ASSETS

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- Self-awareness
- Self-advocacy
- Time management

### FINDINGS

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The national cultural devaluing of sleep is detrimental to MIT's mission and to the vitality of the community. Barriers to healthy sleep are rooted in MIT cultural expectations (preoccupation with success and achievement; impostor syndrome; culture of suffering; being "hardcore") and not in the rigor and pace of academic standards. Students in the focus groups demonstrate that it is possible to meet the academic *and* social demands of MIT while maintaining a healthy sleep lifestyle.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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A genuine shift in culture requires the entire MIT community's motivation and ownership. In order to shift sleep culture at MIT, faculty, staff, and peers must encourage and empower students who prioritize healthy sleep habits. Suggestions for prioritizing wellness and healthy sleep habits include:

- Staff and faculty who encourage sleep accountability to create a sense of belonging for students
- Faculty who are mindful of wellness and self-care in their classroom, lab, or research group
- Time management education and support during students' first year experience
- Guidelines to facilitate peer education on high-quality sleep



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