

TIME IS OF THE ABSENCE

As schoolwork and the need for socializing pile up, students find themselves pushing one of the most important activities out of their schedules — sleep.

BY ARIJIT TRIVEDI & ETHAN MONASA

“I usually wake up around 10 minutes before class.” That’s junior Dylan Margolis. It’s 8:10 a.m. He opens his eyes to the sound of his phone playing “By the Seaside.”

Rolling out of the lower bunk, Margolis sleepily slips on his back brace and trudges over to his bathroom counter to brush his teeth. With three minutes left until class, he logs onto his PC, which he’s ironically named Hal after HAL 9000 from “2001: A Space Odyssey.”

The conga drums of “Africa” by Toto echo through the computer’s speakers as the red eye of Hal stares at Margolis — busy trying to remember his Zoom password — through his PC screen.

It’s now 9:50 a.m. A look at the clock reminds Margolis of his grumbling stomach and his long day ahead. His five classes — four of which are advanced placement — slowly tick by as the hands on the clock approach 3:25 p.m., the end of the school day, and soon, the start of paste-up, where Margolis must work on his page for the upcoming Octagon issue. He calls it a night at 3 a.m., having finished his homework and arriving at a suitable stopping point for his page. He’ll get five hours of sleep again.

Margolis said he doesn’t regret getting little sleep. He would rather stay up and finish his assignments to do well in school or socialize with his friends than get more than six hours of sleep.

“Sleeping is for the weak,” he joked.

Margolis isn’t alone, either. Sleep deprivation is a widespread problem in high schools across the country — 68.4% of teenagers get less than eight hours of sleep, according to a 2013 survey done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Sleep deprivation has also permeated the Country Day bubble.

Thirty-six of 51 high school students who responded to an Octagon informal poll on Jan. 23 said they got seven or fewer hours of sleep on average. Thirty-one students said schoolwork, or stress stemming from it, keeps them burning the midnight oil.

Dr. Kapil Dhawan, who specializes in pulmonary and sleep medicine at Pulmonary Medical Associates and father of seventh grader Eesha Dhawan, said nine to 10 hours of sleep is ideal for teenagers.

“When you are sleep deprived, unfortunately, you are depriving yourself of rapid eye movement sleep,” Dhawan said.

Rapid eye movement sleep, or REM, usually occurs in multiple phases later in the night and is one of the most important phases of sleep because a lot of body maintenance happens during it, such as memory consolidation and hormonal changes, Dhawan said.

In academics, sleep deprivation is problematic. Sleep-deprived students experience poor memory recall, longer reaction times, and a harder time focusing and learning.

Dhawan said another worry with sleep-deprived teenagers is when they are learning to drive.

“When you are sleep deprived, your response times are slower, so your ability to respond to the external environment or react to somebody who might hit you is affected,” he said.

In addition, according to the National Institutes of Health sleep deprivation can cause:

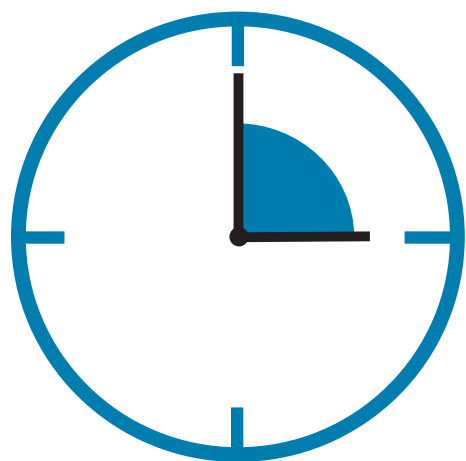
Obesity in adults and children
Diabetes and impaired glucose tolerance
Cardiovascular disease and hypertension

Anxiety symptoms
Depressed mood
Alcohol use

School and studying

Schoolwork is a major factor in the amount of sleep students get, especially when large tests and finals are looming on the horizon.

Senior Hayden Boersma knows this all too well. He often finds himself staying up to catch up on schoolwork. Recently, he pulled an all-nighter to prepare for his AP English and AP Microeconomics finals.



From a poll of 51 Country Day high school students, the lowest reported sleep time is three hours per day.

“I stayed up for like 38 hours, and I told myself I need to fix my sleep schedule now. So, I wanted to go to bed early the next night but I ended up staying up until 1 a.m. without even realizing it since I’m so used to it,” Boersma said.

Margolis also repeatedly sacrifices his sleep for extra time to finish work. Like Boersma, Margolis stayed up all night



Thirty-one of the 51 students polled reported their sleep time is shortened due to schoolwork or school-related stress.

during finals week to finish his project for AP Calculus BC and study for his AP Computer Science Principles final.

“I don’t think I procrastinate that much,” Margolis said. “But I often find myself looking at the clock, thinking it’s not too late and seeing it’s 1:30 a.m., and I have two more assignments left. That’s basically every night.”

Even though students like Margolis and Boersma stay up to do work and increase their chances of getting better grades on tests, Social-Emotional Counselor and Ed-

ucator Pat Reynolds said it’s counterproductive.

“People who stay up all night and study and then don’t get any sleep are not going to be able to access what they’ve been trying to learn because it hasn’t gone from short term to longer term memory,” she said.

Not getting adequate sleep can negatively affect students’ performances on tests; sleep deprivation limits how fast you can finish a task and how quickly you can think and recall information you may need to answer a question, he said.

Dr. Dhawan expressed similar views. “The night before a test, you should try and get as much rest as possible,” Dhawan said.

Boersma and Margolis are well aware of the lower energy levels associated with sleep deprivation.

“That’s my secret, Cap. I’m always tired,” Margolis said, parodying a famous scene in “The Avengers.”

Boersma also has seen problems arising from sleep deprivation seeping into areas of his life other than academics.

With hopes to go pro in the video game Valorant, Boersma has to set aside a few hours every day to consistently practice. However, he notices that his reaction times are often slower and that he can’t play as well when he hasn’t had enough sleep. This makes doing well in important tournaments difficult, Boersma said.

Despite various attempts to correct their sleep schedules, both Boersma and Margolis have failed repeatedly.

For Margolis, sleeping early isn’t an option. For one, he can’t do his work until he’s in a quiet environment — something that only happens in his house late at night. Secondly, if he went to sleep early, he wouldn’t have enough time to stay on track with his work.

“I’m sort of in this cycle. Like ‘I have so much work. I have so much work. I have so much work,’ and then suddenly it’s the weekend,” Margolis said. “Then I sleep in during the weekend and end up staying up late to do everything I want to do in a day. So, I end up just repeating the cycle over and over again.”

Although he finds days where he can get everything done and get adequate sleep, they’re rare.

“It’s an endless cycle of your health bar depleting until you can grab that little power-up of sleeping for 10 hours on that one lucky night,” Margolis said.

Boersma can’t break out of his cycle because he doesn’t fall asleep until around 2 a.m., despite trying to go to bed at midnight.

“It’s tough,” Boersma said. “Going to sleep is something everyone does every single night, but no one actually knows how to go to sleep. The more you try to force sleep, the longer it takes to fall asleep.”

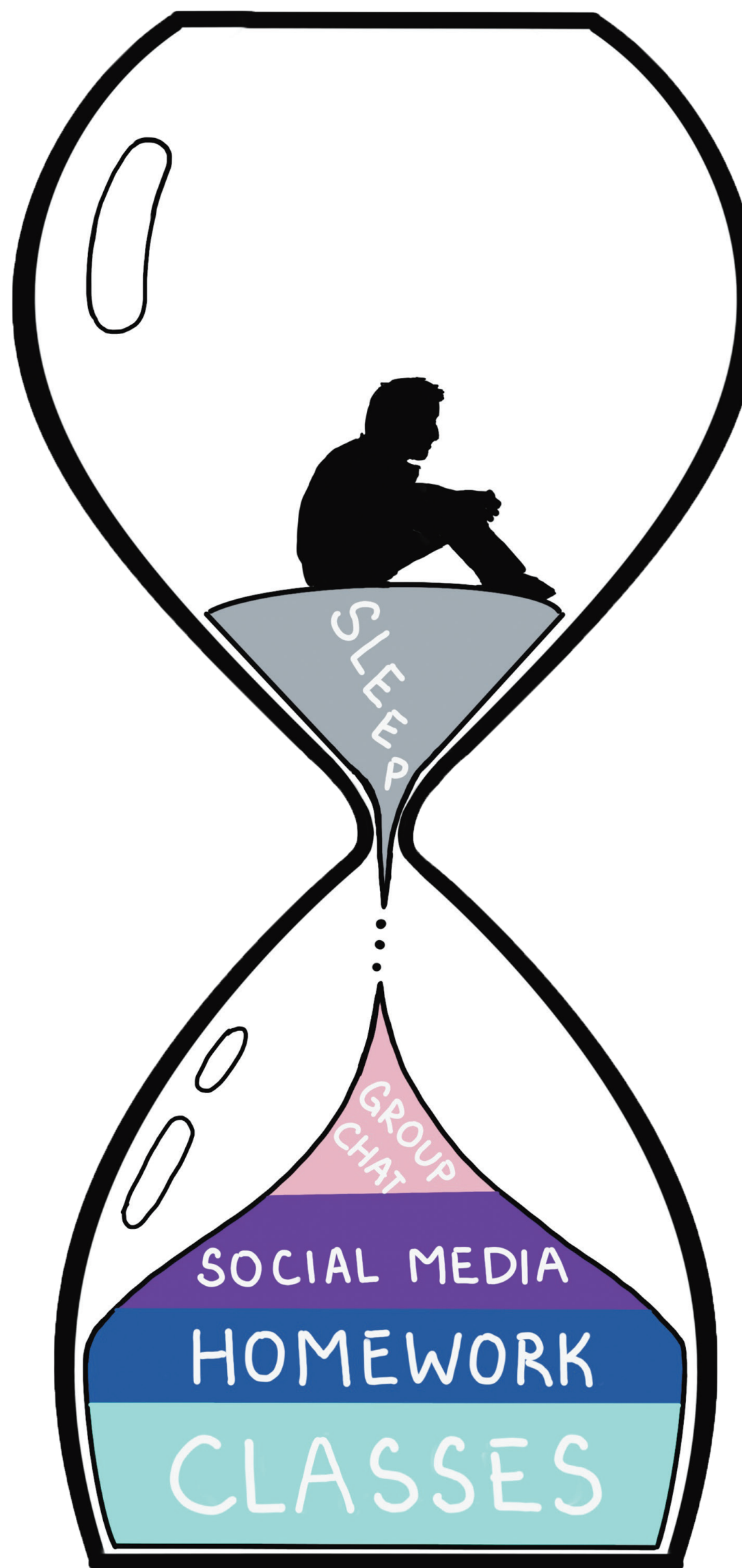
Delayed sleep phase disorder could be the culprit.

“Adolescents can have delayed sleep phase disorder where they can’t go to bed until late and wake up until late,” Dhawan said. Teenagers with this disorder might lack academic performance during the first few periods because of sleep deprivation, Dhawan said.

Unfortunately, it takes a long time to gradually push back your bedtime to fix a delayed sleep phase, Dhawan said.

“There’s no quick fix. You’re not just going to decide overnight that you’ll be able to sleep an hour or two earlier,” he said.

Junior Malek Owaidat’s sleep schedule is shifted later — and fragmented. On weekends, he goes to bed around 5 a.m., waking up around 1 p.m. or 2 p.m.. But on weekdays, Owaidat cannot sleep in. Instead, he takes naps in the afternoon after school



GRAPHICS BY CHARLIE ACQUISTO, HERMIONE XIAN AND MING ZHU.
BOOKSTACK RETRIEVED FROM FLATICON.COM

ends and a nap in the evening after his soccer practices. In total, he said he gets nine to 10 hours spaced throughout the day.

Fragmented sleep phases often result in unrestfulness because the body is usually not getting the REM sleep it needs, Dhawan said.

During evening soccer practices, Owaidat feels more fatigued. But, he said it does not hinder his ability to focus in class.

Procrastination is the primary cause for his late bedtime. Owaidat has his phone and his PC in his bedroom. While the PC is not a distraction, he said the phone can be. Owaidat said his sleep schedule has become worse recently. Earlier in high school, he went to bed by 2 a.m. or 3 a.m.

Since he has maintained the same sleep schedule for so long, he has found it hard to break.

The inconsistency and “awkwardness” of the hybrid schedule also makes developing a consistent sleep schedule difficult for Boersma.

“Nobody knows what’s going on except the students sitting there because they’re the ones who are suffering through it,” Boersma said.

Margolis also said that the additional work that six classes back-to-back brings makes it hard for him to find free time while getting enough sleep.

“For AP Calculus BC, we have all these extra assignments,” he said. “And I’d love to do them, but I can’t do them because I either don’t have the time or when I do, it’s the one time I can take a break. Am I going to choose that one break or more homework?”

Social life

Social lives have a large impact on student’s overall well-being, with social media platforms as an integral part of this.

According to a 2018 Pew Research study, 72% of teenagers use Instagram, 69% use Snapchat and 51% use Facebook.

Widespread use of social media has become an addiction for some, Dhawan said.

“I think it’s adding undue stress because all you’re seeing is a snapshot of someone’s life,” he said.

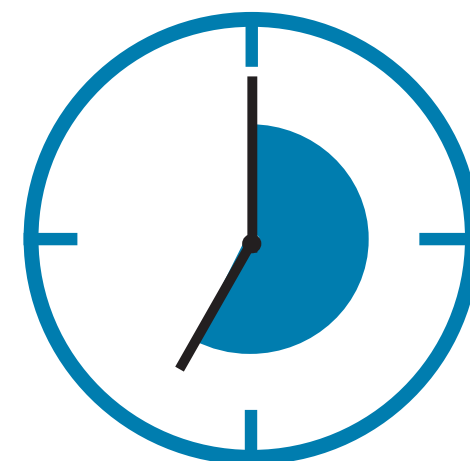
In addition, viewing politically charged media also can increase stress, making it more difficult to fall asleep and worsening sleep quality, Dhawan said.

Due to COVID-19, more social interactions have been moved online.

“To hang out with your friends or do anything social, you’re basically online,” Boersma said.

He added that he spends a significant amount of his free time interacting with his friends, more so during senior year than previously. A lot of times, conversations late at night or early in the morning limit the amount of time he spends sleeping.

He often finds himself trying to fit that



Thirty-six of the 51 students polled reported an average of seven or less hours of sleep per day.

free time with his friends right before his bedtime.

During winter break, he tried to correct his sleep cycle, but he ended up staying up late, relaxing and talking with his friends, further worsening his sleep schedule.

“The big reason why I’m so screwed up is that I don’t have any free time,” Boersma said. “I stay up trying to talk to my friends. Sure, I could change it, but it’s at the cost of being social, which is a big issue during quarantine since you don’t actually see anyone.”

Sleep disorders

A sleep disorder is a condition that disrupts sleep patterns. There are over 80 types of sleep disorders, with the most common being insomnia, according to medlineplus.gov.

Junior Hailey Fesai has insomnia. On top of that, she has anxiety which is worse at night, keeping her mind racing some nights.

“I lay down to go to sleep. It’s 12, and then I turn around and it’s five in the morning, and I have to get up,” Fesai said. “There would be nights where I wouldn’t sleep at all.”

On average, Fesai goes to bed around 10:30 p.m. and wakes up around 6:30 a.m. in the morning. Because staying asleep the whole time is a challenge, she has devised numerous ways to help her fall asleep, such as reading before bed or listening to the white noise of a heater in her bedroom.

In addition, she takes medicated Cannabidiol (CBD) oils to counter her insomnia. With both insomnia and anxiety running in her family, she has a support system of people who can help her cope.

“I think it’s important to take time for yourself and journal or talk about what you’re feeling with somebody you love,” Fesai said. She has found that the more she acknowledges her challenges, the better she is able to combat them.

One method she uses to do so is a poster board where she writes down thoughts that go through her mind during an anxiety attack. This allows her to organize what runs through her head.

While her sleep issues grew worse in high school, especially at the end of sophomore year, she said they have improved more recently.

Tips to get more sleep

So, how can you ensure sleep quality?

Good sleep hygiene is key, Dhawan said.

A consistent sleep schedule, using the bed exclusively for sleep, and keeping a quiet, dark and cool environment make good sleep hygiene.

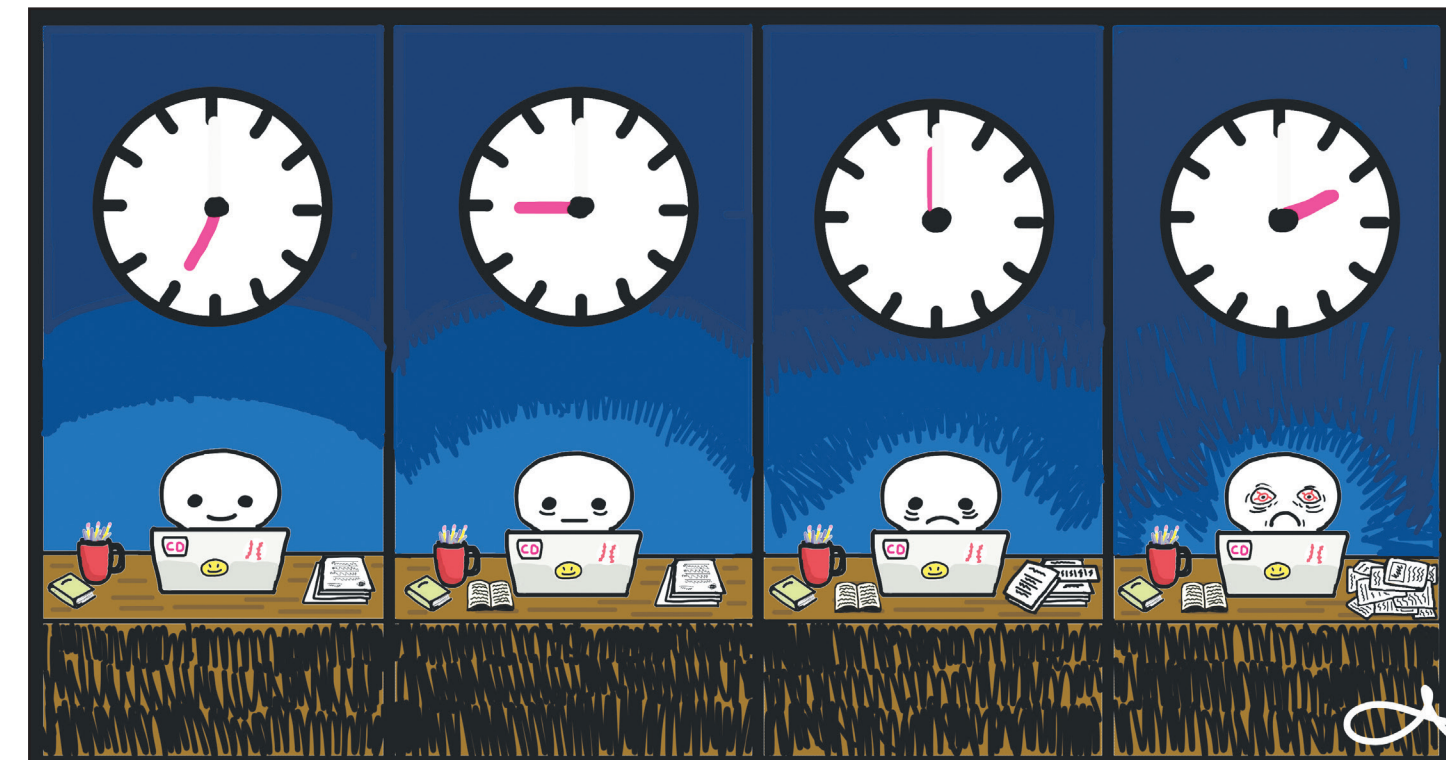
He recommended avoiding caffeine from coffee or dark chocolate after 2 p.m.

In addition, warm showers and baths are best taken several hours before bedtime as they can also affect your ability to sleep.

Also, Dhawan said to avoid exercise within two hours of going to sleep.

To avoid stress, it’s recommended to do deep breathing exercises before bed and avoid social media, Dhawan said.

Reynolds suggested creating a ritual or routine for yourself before going to bed. Creating patterns or habits — such as drinking a warm glass of milk or washing your face — can teach the body when it is time to go to bed, she said. Above all, consistency is important.



“Working Late” by Charlie Acquisto