The Psychology of Over-Control in Sleep Anxiety Among College Students

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Abstract: Sleep anxiety among college students is not only caused by poor sleep itself. It is also closely related to the strong wish to control sleep. When students treat sleep as a task that must be completed on time, they may become more alert before bedtime. They may check the clock, notice small body feelings, and worry about the effect of poor sleep on study and daily life. These actions seem to help at first, but they often make the mind more tense. This essay analyzes sleep anxiety from the view of over-control psychology. It argues that excessive sleep effort, self-monitoring, fear of losing control, and repeated negative sleep experiences can form a cycle of anxiety. A more flexible view of sleep may help reduce this pressure. Sleep should be supported by stable habits, but it should not be forced through strict control.

Keywords: sleep anxiety; college students; over-control; sleep effort; self-monitoring; academic pressure

1. Introduction

Sleep anxiety among college students is not only a problem of poor sleep. It is also a problem of fear before sleep (Harvey, A. G., 2002). Many students do not simply lie in bed and wait for sleep. They think about whether they can fall asleep, how long they can sleep, and whether the next day will be affected. Sleep then becomes a matter that carries pressure. It is no longer only a natural body need.

College life often gives students more freedom, but this freedom also asks them to manage themselves. They need to arrange classes, assignments, exams, social life, part-time work, club activities, and personal plans. Sleep becomes one part of this self-management. Many students know that sleep is related to attention, memory, mood, and daily energy. Because of this, they may pay close attention to their sleep. This attention is understandable, but it can become a problem when it turns into strict control.

Some students treat sleep as a task that must be completed at a certain time. They may set a fixed bedtime, count the hours before morning, check the clock, and force themselves to fall asleep quickly. They may think that a good night must be long, deep, and uninterrupted. If this standard is not reached, they may feel that the night has failed. A short delay in falling asleep may then cause strong

worry. A normal waking period during the night may also be seen as a serious sign.

This kind of worry is closely related to over-control. Over-control means that a person wants to manage too many details and cannot accept small changes. In sleep anxiety, over-control often appears as the wish to control bedtime, sleep length, sleep quality, body feelings, thoughts, and even emotions. The student wants to make sleep safe by controlling every part of it. Yet sleep does not work well under strong control. Sleep often comes when attention becomes loose and the body feels less pressure. When the student keeps checking and forcing, the mind stays awake (Espie, C. A., Broomfield, N. M., MacMahon, K. M., Macphee, L. M., & Taylor, L. M., 2006).

The problem is not that students should ignore sleep. A regular routine and a calm environment are useful. The problem appears when sleep is treated like an exam or a performance. In that state, the student does not only want to rest. They want to prove that they can control the body, time, and the next day. If sleep comes late, they may feel that this control is being lost. This feeling can create more fear than the poor sleep itself.

Sleep anxiety often begins with a small event. A student may have one bad night because of study pressure, noise, screen use, or emotional stress. The next day may feel uncomfortable. The student remembers this discomfort. When night comes again, the student begins to worry that the same thing will happen. This worry makes the body alert. The student then tries harder to control sleep. The harder they try, the more sleep becomes difficult. A short-term sleep problem can slowly become a repeated psychological pattern (Schmidt, R. E., Harvey, A. G., & Van der Linden, M., 2018).

This essay analyzes sleep anxiety among college students from the view of over-control psychology. It focuses on several connected problems: the fear of poor sleep, the wish for perfect sleep, the paradox of trying too hard, self-monitoring before bedtime, academic pressure, emotional reinforcement, and the need for a more flexible view of sleep.

2. Sleep Anxiety as a Mental State

Sleep anxiety is a state of worry, tension, and fear related to sleep. It is different from simply staying awake for a while. A person may not fall asleep quickly for many normal reasons. The room may be noisy. The body may not feel tired yet. The student may have studied late or used a phone for too long. These things may delay sleep, but they do not always become anxiety. Sleep anxiety appears when the student begins to fear wakefulness itself.

For college students, this fear often starts before bedtime. A student may finish evening tasks and begin to think about the coming night. The body has not yet entered bed, but the mind is already preparing for a possible sleep failure. The student may think about the last bad night. They may worry that they will stay awake again. They may also imagine the next day in a negative way. Before sleep has even started, the student has already entered a tense mental state.

This state changes the meaning of sleep. Sleep is usually a natural process. The body becomes tired, the mind becomes quieter, and sleep arrives without too much effort. In sleep anxiety, this natural process becomes a target. The student waits for sleep, watches for sleep, and judges whether sleep is coming. If sleep comes slowly, the student may feel that something is wrong. The delay may be small, but the fear can be strong.

Sleep anxiety often includes worry about the result of poor sleep. A student may think that poor sleep will lead to bad memory, low attention, poor mood, weak physical strength, or poor performance. These worries may have some real basis, because sleep does affect daily function. Yet the anxious mind often makes the result larger than it is. One poor night is treated as a serious threat. The student may feel that tomorrow has already been damaged before it begins.

This kind of thinking makes sleep carry too much weight. A student no longer sees sleep only as rest. Sleep becomes linked with grades, image, self-control, health, and future plans. The fear is not only "I may not sleep." It becomes "I may lose control of

tomorrow." This stronger meaning makes the student more nervous. The body then becomes more alert, and sleep becomes harder.

Sleep anxiety also changes the way students feel their own bodies. A normal heartbeat may be noticed more clearly. Breathing may feel strange because the student keeps paying attention to it. A small body feeling may be seen as a warning sign. The student may think, "I am too awake," "My heart is beating too fast," or "My mind is too clear." These thoughts may not be accurate, but they feel convincing at night. The quiet room gives the student more space to notice every small feeling.

This state can also affect emotions. Some students feel fear. Some feel anger because sleep does not come. Some feel shame because they think they cannot manage themselves well. Some feel helpless because they have tried many methods but still cannot relax. These emotions may appear together. The student may move between fear, frustration, and self-blame in the same night.

Sleep anxiety becomes more serious when bedtime is connected with repeated negative memory. If a student has experienced several poor nights, the bed may no longer feel safe. The pillow, darkness, silence, and bedtime routine may remind the student of past sleeplessness. The body may become tense as soon as the student enters the room. This reaction can happen even when there is no strong pressure during the day. The night itself becomes a signal of danger.

The mental state of sleep anxiety is also supported by attention. The student pays attention to sleep because sleep feels important. Yet this attention keeps the mind awake. The student keeps asking whether sleep has arrived. They keep checking whether the body is ready (Lundh, L. G., & Broman, J. E., 2000). They keep predicting how bad tomorrow will be. These mental actions do not look active from the outside, but inside they are heavy work.

This is why sleep anxiety should not be understood only as a lack of sleep. It is a pattern of fear around sleep. The student is not only awake. They are afraid of being awake (Morin, C. M., 1993). They are not only tired. They are also worried about what tiredness means. This fear gives ordinary sleep difficulty a stronger emotional force

3. Over-Control and the Desire for Perfect Sleep

Over-control means that a person wants to manage sleep too closely (Broomfield, N. M., & Espie, C. A., 2005). The student may want to sleep at a fixed time, wake up at a fixed time, and keep the same number of sleep hours every night. This plan is not wrong by itself. A stable routine can support rest. The problem appears when the student treats the plan as a strict rule. Once the body does not follow the plan, the student may feel that something has gone wrong.

Some students begin to see sleep as a task. They may tell themselves, "I must fall asleep before eleven," or "I must sleep eight hours tonight." These thoughts look like self-discipline, but they can also carry pressure. The student is no longer preparing for sleep in a relaxed way. They are giving themselves an order. If sleep does not come at the expected time, the order is broken. A short delay may then feel like a failure.

The desire for perfect sleep often comes from the wish to manage life well (Akram, U., Ellis, J. G., Myachykov, A., & Barclay, N. L., 2015). Many students believe that a good student should control time, study, exercise, diet, and sleep. Sleep becomes part of personal performance. A good night means the student is disciplined. A bad night means the student has not managed the body well. This belief makes sleep carry too much meaning. The student may not only worry about being tired. They may also feel shame, blame, or disappointment.

Perfect sleep is also an unrealistic goal. Sleep cannot stay the same every night. Some nights are deep and easy. Some nights are lighter. Sometimes a student wakes up once or twice. Sometimes it takes longer to fall asleep. These changes can happen even when there is no serious problem. Sleep is affected by daily pressure, mood, exercise, food, light, noise, and many small events. But students with sleep anxiety may not accept these changes. They may expect sleep to be stable, quick, and fully under control.

This expectation can make ordinary sleep changes feel serious. If the student wakes up in the middle of the night, they may think the whole night has been ruined. If they do not feel sleepy at the planned time, they may begin to worry. If they sleep less than expected, they may judge the next day before it begins. The worry then becomes stronger than the sleep problem itself. The student may lose sleep not because the body cannot sleep, but because the mind cannot accept an imperfect night.

Over-control may also appear in many small behaviors. The student may make strict bedtime rules, avoid all small changes in the evening, or arrange the bedroom in a very fixed way. They may feel unsafe if one detail changes. For example, a little noise, a different pillow, a later shower, or a short delay in finishing homework may make them nervous. These details are not always important for sleep. But the student may believe that one wrong detail can destroy the whole night.

This kind of control gives a short sense of safety. When the student follows every rule, they may feel that sleep is protected. Yet the safety is weak. It depends on too many conditions. Once one condition changes, anxiety appears again. The student then adds more rules. They may try to control light, sound, temperature, phone use, posture, breathing, and thoughts. The more rules they create, the easier it is to feel that something is wrong.

The desire for perfect sleep can also make students fear normal tiredness. A person may feel a little tired after a busy day. This does not always mean poor sleep or poor health. But an anxious student may treat tiredness as proof that the body is not working well. They may then become more focused on the next night. They may think that tonight must repair everything. This puts more pressure on sleep. The night becomes a chance to fix the whole day, and the student becomes afraid of failing again.

Over-control turns sleep from rest into performance. The student is not simply going to bed. They are trying to meet a standard. They want the right bedtime, the right sleep length, the right depth, and the right feeling after waking. These standards may look healthy, but they can become too hard to meet. When sleep is judged too strictly, the student has less room to relax. The wish for perfect sleep then becomes one reason why sleep anxiety continues.

4. The Paradox of Trying Too Hard to Sleep

Sleep cannot be forced in the same way as study or exercise. A student can decide to read for one hour, finish an assignment, or review notes. Sleep is different. It depends on a lower level of mental and physical activity. The body needs to slow down. The mind also needs to move away from strong attention. When a student tries too hard to sleep, this quiet state is often broken. The mind stays active because it is still checking whether sleep has arrived. This creates a common problem in sleep anxiety. The student wants to relax, but the effort to relax becomes another task. They may close their eyes and tell themselves to stop thinking. They may force themselves to keep still. They may try to control their breathing or empty their mind. These actions seem useful, but they can make the person more aware of every small change. The student may notice that thoughts are still present. They may notice that the body is not fully relaxed. They may notice that sleep has not come as quickly as expected.

At this point, the student may begin to fight with wakefulness. A few minutes of being awake can feel like a warning. The student may think, “I should be asleep now,” or “If I stay awake, tomorrow will be terrible.” These thoughts make sleep feel urgent. The body then becomes more alert. The student may feel a faster heartbeat, warmer skin, dry mouth, or pressure in the head. These feelings may only be normal signs of tension, but they are often understood as proof that sleep is failing.

The harder the student tries to solve the problem, the more the problem grows. They may change sleeping posture many times. They may adjust the pillow, pull the quilt, open or close the window, or check whether the room is quiet enough. Each small action gives a short sense of control. Soon, the worry returns. The student may then check the time and

calculate how many hours are left before morning. This makes sleep feel even more difficult.

Trying too hard to sleep also makes the bed feel less like a place of rest. The student is lying down, but the mind is still working. It is planning, checking, judging, and predicting. The person may not be doing visible work, yet the inner effort is strong. This hidden effort keeps the brain close to a waking state. Sleep needs a loose and accepting state, but strong control keeps the student in a state of tension. The paradox is clear. The student wants sleep, but the strong wish to sleep becomes pressure. The student tries to remove anxiety, but the effort to remove it makes anxiety easier to notice. The student wants to control the body, but the body becomes harder to calm down. In this way, sleep anxiety is not only caused by lack of sleep. It is also caused by the way the student reacts to the possibility of not sleeping.

5. Self-Monitoring before Bedtime

Self-monitoring before bedtime means that the student keeps checking their own body, thoughts, and sleep state. This habit often begins with a simple wish to understand what is happening. The student may want to know whether the body is relaxed, whether the eyes feel heavy, whether the mind is quiet, or whether sleep is getting close. These checks may seem harmless. They may even seem careful and reasonable. Yet they can keep the mind close to the problem of sleep. When attention stays too close to sleep, sleep becomes harder to enter.

Many students with sleep anxiety become very sensitive to small body feelings. A faster heartbeat, a slight headache, a dry throat, a warm face, or a change in breathing may be noticed quickly. These feelings are not always signs of a sleep problem. They may come from stress, tiredness, room temperature, late meals, screen use, or normal body changes. But the anxious student may read them in a negative way. A faster heartbeat may be seen as a sign of anxiety. A clear mind may be seen as a sign that sleep will not come. A small sound in the room may be seen as a reason for staying awake. The body is still normal, but the student begins to treat it as a warning.

This kind of attention can make the body feel even more tense. When the student keeps checking the heartbeat, the heartbeat may feel stronger. When the student keeps checking breathing, breathing may become less natural. When the student keeps asking whether the body is relaxed, the body may feel less relaxed. The problem is not the body feeling itself. The problem is the way the student watches it. The more they watch, the harder it is to let the feeling pass.

Clock-checking is another common form of self-monitoring. A student may look at the time before turning off the light. Then they may look again after a few minutes. At first, this seems like a way to know the situation. Soon, it becomes a way to measure failure. The student may begin to calculate how many hours are left before morning. Seven hours become six hours. Six hours become five hours. The number becomes smaller, and the pressure becomes heavier. The clock does not help the student sleep. It reminds the student that sleep has not arrived.

Phone use can make this problem stronger. Some students use phones to check the time, record sleep, play white noise, or read sleep advice. These actions may be meant to help sleep. Yet the phone can also pull attention back to control. A student may open a sleep app in the morning and judge the night by a number. If the app shows light sleep or low sleep quality, the student may feel that the night was a failure, even if they functioned normally during the day. Sleep data then becomes another source of pressure (Baron, K. G., Abbott, S., Jao, N., Manalo, N., & Mullen, R., 2017). The student no longer trusts their own body feeling. They may trust the number more than their real experience.

Self-monitoring also appears in the way students judge their thoughts. Before sleep, the mind may naturally produce small thoughts. A student may think about tomorrow's class, a message from a friend, a recent mistake, or an unfinished task. These thoughts do not always block sleep. Many people fall asleep while thoughts slowly fade. But students with sleep anxiety may treat any thought as a

problem. They may tell themselves, "I should not be thinking now." This makes the thought more noticeable. The student then watches the thought, fights the thought, and worries about the thought. A normal mental activity becomes a sign of failure.

Bedtime can then feel like an examination. The student is not only lying in bed. They are also checking whether they are doing sleep correctly. They may ask whether they are calm enough, sleepy enough, still enough, or relaxed enough. These questions keep the brain active. The student becomes both the sleeper and the observer. The body is in bed, but the mind stands outside and judges the process. This split makes sleep less natural.

Self-monitoring can also change the meaning of the bed. The bed should be linked with rest, safety, and letting go. For students with strong sleep anxiety, the bed may become linked with checking, waiting, and judging. Before lying down, they may already expect another difficult night. This expectation can make the body alert earlier than usual. The student may not even feel anxious during the day, but the feeling returns when night comes. The bedroom, the pillow, the darkness, and the quiet room may all remind the student of past failed sleep.

This pattern is painful because the student is trying to help themselves. They do not want to stay awake. They do not want to feel anxious. They want to find a way to sleep better. But self-monitoring turns help into pressure. It makes sleep look like something that must be watched closely. Sleep needs less attention, not more. When the student checks too much, sleep becomes a problem that is being tested all the time.

6. Academic Pressure and the Fear of Losing Control

College students often connect sleep with study performance (Lund, H. G., Reider, B. D., Whiting, A. B., & Prichard, J. R., 2010). Many students believe that good sleep means better memory, clearer thinking, and stronger attention. This belief is not wrong. Sleep is important for learning and emotional balance (Hershner, S. D., & Chervin, R. D., 2014). The problem appears when students place too much pressure on one night of sleep. A single bad night may be seen as a threat to the whole next day.

This pressure is stronger when there are exams, presentations, interviews, competitions, or important assignments. Before sleep, the student may not only think about sleeping. They may think about the task that will happen tomorrow. The mind may repeat the same worry: "If I cannot sleep tonight, I will not do well." This thought turns sleep into a condition for success. The student may feel that they must sleep well in order to protect tomorrow's performance.

This belief can make bedtime tense. The student wants to sleep because they need energy. Yet this need creates pressure. The more important tomorrow feels, the harder sleep may become. The student may try to sleep early before an exam, but the mind may stay active. They may review knowledge again and again in their head. They may imagine mistakes. They may picture themselves feeling tired in the classroom. These thoughts keep the body awake.

Academic pressure also makes students fear losing control over time. College life often asks students to plan their own schedules. Many students try to divide time into study, rest, exercise, social life, and personal work. Sleep becomes part of this order. If sleep fails, the order feels broken. The student may think that the next day's plan will be ruined. They may worry that they will wake up late, miss class, study poorly, or lose the rhythm of the week.

This fear is not only about sleep. It is about control over daily life. A student may feel safe when everything follows a plan. The plan gives a sense of stability. When sleep becomes uncertain, this sense of stability is shaken. The student may feel that the body is not obeying the mind. This feeling can be frightening, especially for students who are used to strict self-management.

Some students also connect sleep with personal worth (Akram, U., Ellis, J. G., Myachykov, A., & Barclay, N. L., 2015). They may believe that a capable person should manage sleep well. They may

think that a disciplined student should sleep on time and wake up early. When they cannot do this, they may blame themselves. They may think they are weak, lazy, or not strong enough. This self-blame adds emotional pressure to the sleep problem.

Self-blame is harmful because it makes the next night more difficult. After a poor night, the student may spend the day feeling disappointed. They may keep thinking, "I failed again last night." When night comes, this memory returns. The student may want to prove that they can sleep well this time. This wish sounds positive, but it can become another form of pressure. Sleep becomes a test of self-control.

Academic competition can also make students compare sleep. Some students may hear others say they sleep well, wake early, or study late without feeling tired. This comparison can create shame. A student with sleep anxiety may feel different from others. They may think others can manage college life better. Even when this comparison is not accurate, it can deepen anxiety. The student may hide the problem and deal with it alone.

The fear of falling behind is also important. A student may think that one poor night will lead to a weak day, and one weak day will lead to lower grades. This chain of thought may move very fast at night. The mind may jump from "I am still awake" to "I will fail tomorrow" in a few seconds. The real problem may only be a short delay in falling asleep, but the imagined result becomes much larger.

This thinking pattern is close to disaster thinking. The student does not only see the present moment. They imagine the worst result. They may think that poor sleep will make them unable to listen in class, unable to remember, unable to speak clearly, or unable to finish work. These predictions may not come true. Many students can still function after an imperfect night. Yet the anxious mind treats these predictions as facts.

Academic pressure also affects the body. When the student feels that tomorrow is important, the body may stay in a state of preparation. The heart may beat faster. Muscles may become tight. The mind may remain alert. This state is useful before action, but it is not useful for sleep. The body is preparing to deal with a challenge, not to rest. The student may lie in bed, but the body still acts as if it needs to stay ready.

The fear of losing control can make students add more sleep rules. They may decide that they must go to bed earlier, avoid all evening activities, stop talking to friends at night, or follow a strict routine. Some rules may help, but too many rules can make life smaller. The student may begin to fear any change in the evening. A small delay, a message from a classmate, or a noise from the dormitory may feel dangerous because it breaks the sleep plan.

This strict control may protect sleep for a short time, but it also makes sleep fragile. If sleep depends on perfect conditions, then many ordinary events can become threats. College life is not always quiet or predictable. Roommates may make noise. Tasks may change. Emotions may rise. Schedules may shift. A student who needs full control may feel unsafe in these normal situations.

A more balanced view is needed. Sleep is important for study, but it is not the only factor that decides performance. One imperfect night does not destroy the next day. Tiredness is uncomfortable, but it can often be managed. When students understand this, sleep may carry less pressure. The mind no longer treats every poor night as a serious failure

7. Emotional Reinforcement in the Sleep Anxiety Cycle

Sleep anxiety can become stronger through repeated experience. At the beginning, a student may only have one poor night. This night may happen because of stress, late study, emotional conflict, illness, noise, or screen use. The next day may feel difficult. The student may feel tired, slow, or irritable. This discomfort leaves a strong memory. The student begins to remember not only the poor sleep, but also the fear and helplessness that came with it.

When night comes again, this memory may return. The student may think, "Will it happen again?" This question creates fear before any real sleep difficulty appears. The student may still have enough chance

to sleep, but the mind has already started to prepare for failure. This early fear makes the body alert. The student then enters bed with tension instead of calm. This is how emotional reinforcement begins. A bad experience creates fear. Fear creates body tension. Body tension makes sleep harder. Poor sleep then confirms the fear. The student may think, "I knew I would not sleep well." This thought makes the next night more difficult. The cycle does not need a serious sleep disorder to begin. It can grow from repeated worry and repeated checking.

The thought "It is happening again" is very important in this cycle. A normal delay in sleep may not be serious. Many people need some time to fall asleep. But for a student with sleep anxiety, this delay has a special meaning. It is not only a delay. It is seen as the return of a familiar problem. Once the student gives this meaning to the delay, fear becomes stronger.

Fear then changes the body. The student may feel a faster heartbeat, warm skin, tight muscles, or restless breathing. These body reactions may only come from anxiety. Yet the student may see them as signs that sleep is impossible. This interpretation creates more fear. The student then becomes trapped between body feelings and negative thoughts.

Control behavior enters the cycle at this point. The student wants to stop the fear, so they try to control sleep more strongly. They may force the body to stay still. They may control breathing. They may repeat calming words. They may change posture many times. They may check the clock. They may decide to go to bed earlier the next night. These actions are meant to solve the problem, but they often make sleep more central in the mind.

Over-control gives a short sense of safety. When the student does something, they feel that they are not helpless. This feeling may last for a short time. Yet the action also sends a message to the mind: sleep is dangerous and must be managed carefully. The mind then becomes even more focused on sleep. The student may become afraid of doing nothing. They may feel that if they stop controlling, the night will fail.

This is why sleep anxiety is hard to break. Some behaviors seem helpful on the surface, but they keep the cycle alive. Clock-checking gives information, but it increases pressure. Going to bed too early gives more time in bed, but it may also create more time for worry. Forcing the mind to stop thinking may make thoughts stronger. Searching for sleep advice late at night may give comfort, but it also keeps attention on sleep.

Emotional reinforcement can also appear during the day. After a bad night, the student may check their energy again and again. They may notice every moment of tiredness. They may think, "This is because I did not sleep." If they make a small mistake, they may blame poor sleep. If they feel low in mood, they may also blame poor sleep. In this way, the whole day becomes proof that the bad night was serious.

This daytime focus makes the next night more loaded. The student may think that they cannot allow another poor night. The new night becomes a chance to repair the last one. This creates pressure. The student may enter bed with a strong wish to recover. The wish is understandable, but it can make the mind tense. Sleep becomes urgent again.

The cycle may also affect self-image. A student may begin to see themselves as someone who has a sleep problem (Spielman, A. J., Caruso, L. S., & Glovinsky, P. B., 1987). This identity can deepen fear. The student may think, "I am the kind of person who cannot sleep well." This thought can make each night feel risky. Even before any difficulty appears, the student expects trouble. Expectation then changes the body and mind.

The longer this cycle continues, the more automatic it becomes. The student may not need a clear reason to feel anxious at night. Bedtime itself becomes enough to trigger worry. The room becomes quiet, the lights are turned off, and the mind begins to check. This automatic reaction shows that sleep anxiety has become a learned pattern. It is not only a response to one poor night. It is a repeated link between bedtime, fear, control, and wakefulness.

Breaking this cycle requires less fear around wakefulness. The student needs to learn that being

awake in bed for a while is uncomfortable, but it is not a disaster. A delayed sleep start does not always mean a failed night. A poor night does not always mean a ruined day. When these meanings become softer, the emotional force behind the cycle becomes weaker

8. Reducing Over-Control through a More Flexible View of Sleep

Reducing over-control does not mean giving up sleep management. It means changing the way students relate to sleep. Good sleep habits are useful, but they should not become strict rules that create fear. Sleep needs support, not force. A student can create better conditions for sleep, but they cannot command sleep to arrive at once.

A flexible view of sleep begins with accepting normal changes. Sleep is not the same every night. Some nights may be deep. Some nights may be light. Some nights may include short waking periods. Some nights may begin later than expected. These changes are common. They do not always mean that something is wrong. When students can accept this, they are less likely to turn every small change into a problem.

The idea of "perfect sleep" should be weakened. A student does not need every night to be long, deep, and smooth. A good sleep pattern can still include imperfect nights. The body often adjusts over time. If one night is poor, the next day may be uncomfortable, but it can still be lived through. This view reduces fear. Sleep no longer has to protect the whole future.

Students can also change their response to wakefulness. When they notice that they are still awake, they do not need to fight it at once. Fighting wakefulness often makes the mind more active. A calmer response may be: "I am awake now, but this does not mean the night is ruined." This thought does not force sleep. It only reduces fear. When fear becomes weaker, the body has more chance to relax.

Clock-checking should be reduced because it often feeds anxiety. Looking at the time may seem useful, but it usually leads to calculation. The student begins to count how many hours are left. This makes the night feel shorter and more threatening. Keeping the clock away from the bed can reduce this pressure. The goal is not to hide reality. The goal is to stop turning every minute into a judgment.

Students also need to be careful with sleep data. Sleep apps and wearable devices may give numbers about sleep length, sleep depth, and sleep quality. These numbers can be interesting, but they are not the full truth of sleep. A student may feel acceptable in the morning, but a low score may make them believe the night was bad. The number then changes the feeling. For students with sleep anxiety, too much sleep tracking can become another form of self-monitoring.

A more flexible view of sleep also means reducing self-blame. Poor sleep is not always a personal failure. It can be affected by stress, daily rhythm, noise, light, emotion, food, and many ordinary factors. A student who sleeps poorly is not weak. They are experiencing a common human difficulty. When self-blame becomes softer, the pressure before the next night becomes lighter.

The student can still keep stable habits. A regular wake time, less strong light before bed, less phone use in bed, and a quiet sleep environment can help. But these habits should be used as support, not as strict demands. If one rule is broken, the night does not have to fail. A student may sleep later one night and still return to a normal routine the next day. Flexibility protects sleep better than fear.

The bed should also be connected with rest rather than effort. If a student lies in bed and works hard to sleep, the bed may become linked with pressure. It may help to reduce activities that make the bed a place of study, phone use, or worry. The bed should not become an office, a classroom, or a place for repeated checking. This change is simple, but it can slowly rebuild a safer feeling around bedtime.

Students can also learn to let thoughts pass. Before sleep, thoughts may appear naturally. The goal is not to remove every thought. Trying to empty the mind completely can create more tension. It may be better to notice the thought and let it stay in the background. A thought about tomorrow does not need to be solved at night. A worry does not need an

immediate answer. When the student stops treating every thought as a threat, the mind can become quieter.

This change is gradual. A student who has feared sleep for a long time may not relax in one night. Some nights will still be difficult. The important point is to change the reaction to difficulty. If the student reacts with panic, checking, and self-blame, the cycle becomes stronger. If the student reacts with patience and less judgment, the cycle can become weaker.

A flexible view of sleep also protects daily life. Students should not allow one poor night to define the whole next day. They can still attend class, eat normally, talk with others, and finish basic work. They may need to adjust the day, but they do not need to treat it as a disaster. When the day is not fully controlled by sleep fear, the next night may carry less pressure.

The shift from control to trust is not passive. It is an active change in attitude. The student still cares about sleep, but they no longer treats sleep as an object that must be controlled by force. They learn to give the body better conditions, then step back. This is difficult for students who are used to managing everything closely. Yet it fits the nature of sleep better than strict control.

9. Sleep Tracking and the New Pressure of Self-Knowledge

Many college students now know more about sleep than before. They may read health articles, watch short videos about sleep, use sleep apps, or wear devices that record sleep. This knowledge can be helpful. It can remind students to rest, reduce late-night screen use, and keep a more stable routine. Yet too much sleep knowledge can also create pressure. When students know many rules about sleep, they may begin to judge themselves by those rules every night.

Sleep tracking is a clear example. A student may check how long they slept, how many times they woke up, or how much deep sleep they had. At first, this may feel useful. The student wants to understand the body. But for students with sleep anxiety, these numbers may become another form of control. The student may wake up and check the score before noticing how they actually feel. If the score is low, they may decide that the night was bad. The number may become stronger than the body's real feeling.

This creates a new kind of self-monitoring. In the past, the student may have checked the clock at night. Now they may also check sleep data in the morning. The night is judged twice: once while trying to fall asleep, and once after waking up. This makes sleep hard to escape as a topic. The student may think about sleep before bed, during the night, and after waking. Sleep becomes a daily report.

Sleep advice can create a similar problem. Many students know that they should sleep at a regular time, avoid phones, reduce caffeine, keep the room dark, and relax before bed. These suggestions are useful when they are used gently. But they may become stressful when students treat them as strict rules. If the student drinks tea in the afternoon, uses a phone for a few minutes, or sleeps later than planned, they may think the night is already damaged. The rule then creates anxiety before sleep even begins.

The pressure of self-knowledge is that students may feel they should know how to solve the problem. When sleep is poor, they may blame themselves because they have already read many suggestions. They may think, "I know what to do, but I still cannot sleep." This thought can produce shame. The student may feel that the problem is not only sleep, but their own lack of control.

Sleep tracking and sleep advice may also make students focus too much on hidden body processes. Sleep contains many stages and changes that people cannot fully feel. When students receive too much information about these hidden processes, they may begin to worry about things they cannot directly control. They may worry about deep sleep, rapid eye movement sleep, sleep quality score, or heart rate during sleep. These details may become new objects of anxiety.

For students with sleep anxiety, less information may sometimes be better than more information.

This does not mean ignoring health. It means choosing information that helps life, not information that creates fear. A student may ask a simple question: "Does this tool help me relax, or does it make me check more?" If the tool makes the student more tense, it may need to be used less.

A healthy relation with sleep information should leave space for personal feeling. If a student wakes up and feels able to study and live normally, a sleep score should not be allowed to destroy that feeling. If one night is short, it does not need to become a full self-evaluation. Sleep data can be a reference, but it should not become a judge. When students stop turning every number into a warning, the pressure around sleep can become lighter.

10. Peer Comparison and Hidden Sleep Pressure

Sleep anxiety among college students can also be shaped by comparison with others (Wang, C., Lizardo, O., Hachen, D. S., Striegel, A., & Poellabauer, C., 2021). In dormitories, classes, and social groups, students may hear many comments about sleep. Some people say they can sleep quickly. Some say they study late and still feel energetic. Some say they wake up early every day. These comments may sound ordinary, but they can affect students who already worry about sleep.

A student with sleep anxiety may begin to compare themselves with these examples. They may think that others are stronger, more disciplined, or more relaxed. They may feel that their own sleep problem shows weakness. This comparison can create shame. The student may not want to talk about the problem because they fear being seen as sensitive or unable to manage life.

Dormitory life can make this pressure more direct (Wang, C., Lizardo, O., Hachen, D. S., Striegel, A., & Poellabauer, C., 2021). A student may lie awake while roommates fall asleep quickly. The sound of others breathing or sleeping may make the student more aware of being awake. The student may think, "Why can they sleep, but I cannot?" This question can deepen worry. The room becomes a place of comparison, not rest. The student's attention moves from their own body to others' sleep, and then back to their own failure.

Peer comparison can also appear in daily schedules. Some students seem able to study late, wake early, and stay active. A student with sleep anxiety may feel that they need more rest than others. They may worry that this makes them less competitive. They may push themselves to follow others' rhythm even when it does not fit their body. This can disturb sleep further.

Social talk about productivity can add pressure. When students praise hard work, late-night study, and full schedules, rest may be treated as something that must be earned. Sleep then loses its simple meaning as a body need. It becomes linked with achievement and self-discipline. A student may feel guilty for needing rest. They may try to control sleep so that they can keep up with others.

This hidden pressure is not always obvious. The student may say that they only want to sleep better. But behind this wish, there may be fear of being left behind. There may be fear of looking weak. There may be fear of not matching the rhythm of the group. These fears make sleep anxiety more complex. Sleep is personal, but it is also shaped by the social space around the student.

Reducing this pressure requires a more realistic view of difference. Students do not all have the same body rhythm. Some people fall asleep quickly. Some need more time. Some can stay active after short sleep for a day. Some cannot. These differences do not mean that one person is better than another. When students stop using others' sleep as a standard, their own sleep may become less loaded with judgment (Wang, C., Lizardo, O., Hachen, D. S., Striegel, A., & Poellabauer, C., 2021).

A student also needs to see that people do not always show their real condition. Someone who says they sleep little may still feel tired. Someone who looks energetic may also have difficult nights. Social comparison often uses incomplete information. The student compares their private struggle with another person's public image. This comparison is unfair and often inaccurate.

When peer comparison becomes weaker, the student can return attention to their own needs. Sleep does not need to match another person's schedule. Rest does not need to prove anything. A student can build a routine that fits their body and study life. This routine may not look perfect to others, but it can be more stable and less stressful

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