

# How sleep can make or break your career

Indian adults lose about three nights of sleep every week, which affects their physical and mental health and productivity at work

Reem Khokhar

**T**rishita Das, 26, sleeps only three-four hours every night. "I am anxious by nature and have difficulty 'turning off' my brain at the end of a day, especially when working on a difficult project or dealing with stress," says the Delhi-based publishing professional. "I have struggled with sleep for a decade." Inadequate sleep causes migraines, fatigue and a lowered immunity, which makes her prone to frequent colds or bouts of flu, and impacts her work. "It makes me less efficient and more irritable on many days. Managing stress is even more difficult because of insufficient sleep and work always comes with stress."

Das is not alone. Health technology company ResMed's recent *Global Sleep Survey 2025* concluded that adults are losing an average of three nights of sleep per week, pointing towards a global sleep crisis. The survey results, based on interviews with 30,026 people from 13 countries, including India, Japan, China, Thailand, Germany and the US, showed that 49% of Indians struggled to fall asleep at least three times a week, and 47% took sick leave at least once in their careers due to poor sleep. Indian women had worse sleep quality than men, experiencing fewer nights of good sleep (3.83 hours versus 4.13 for men), with hormonal changes and menopause being key disruptors.

Sleep goes beyond rest. It helps boost short- and long-term physical and mental performance. "Science shows that even one night of sleep deprivation can reduce natural killer (NK) cell activity, compromising immunity and increasing inflammation," says Luke Coutinho, an integrative and lifestyle medicine specialist.

At the workplace, erratic sleep can impact focus, creativity, stress management, mood and more. "Poor sleep quality affects your work life significantly, including decision-making, increased mistakes, irritability, anxiety, burn-out, and can lead to health issues like obesity, diabetes, depression and more," says Dr. Nileena N.K.M., a psychiatrist and sleep medicine specialist who is a consultant at Chennai's Nithra Institute of Sleep Sciences.

"As we age, it is challenging to learn new things and poor sleep further impacts memory. Career development can be derailed as upgrad-

ing skills is essential to staying relevant at work," Dr. Nileena says.

Sleep issues are not new, but Dr. Nileena has observed them worsening in recent years with the over-stimulation caused by technology, more light exposure, increased caffeine usage and changes in work culture post covid.

For Rajesh P., sleep issues began post covid owing to disrupted work-from-home schedules and a stressful period at home, which led to anxiety and depression.



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"I fall asleep quickly because I am exhausted, but I wake up around 3am either because my baby needs to be walked, or due to something that I am worried about and struggle to go back to sleep," says the 40-year-old who works for a multinational in Delhi.

He is often tired at work, unable to do deep dives that require focused thought or writing, only managing administrative or coordination work in this state. He tries to shut off by watching something, but that doesn't always help.

Some resort to medication or supplements to help them sleep. Social development professional Ella Sonawane, 61, often struggles to fall asleep, resorting to medicines to help her sleep on some nights. But the next day she struggles to concentrate at work. "I'm irritable but can't show it. I've had to leave work and go home,"

says Delhi-based Sonawane. "My social outreach visits are postponed due to lack of sleep as I don't feel rested enough to travel."

Many organisations across the world emphasise work-life balance, but the reality of working with international teams and looming deadlines makes rest difficult. Rajesh works across multiple time zones, with meetings stretching into the night.

"International systems have frequent mid-year breaks which is absent in India," he says. His company supports employees through hybrid working, and flexible hours and leaves.

"I don't have to deal with micromanaging or watching the clock. But WFH (work from home) means you are always on call, so you never completely switch off," he says.

Despite growing awareness of its importance, sleep is still not often prioritised. "We often treat sleep as something we can catch up on later, squeezing in a few hours between work, social commitments, and late-night screen time," says Coutinho.

## CATCHING UP ON SLEEP

Skipping on sleep is not advised, but there are some tips to deal with the workday after a night of inadequate rest. Expert Luke Coutinho suggests a 30-minute power nap to refresh and energise during the work day. He advises against oversleeping to "make up" for lost hours. Instead, return to a consistent bedtime to realign your circadian rhythm. Hydrating with water and fruit juices without added sugar is better than overloading on caffeine, which can cause energy crashes and disrupt sleep the following night. Gentle movements like stretching or walking and sunlight exposure can improve circulation and reduce grogginess after a bad night.

When Das' choice is between finishing a project on time or getting enough rest, going out with friends or an early night, sleep always loses.

"It doesn't feel like a 'productive' use of time—I'm not getting anything out of it," says Das.

Coutinho advises against underestimating the importance of sleep, reiterating how the lack of it impacts productivity, cognitive abilities and career growth.

## IMPROVING NAP TIME

Das has tried medication, meditation and white noise playlists, but in vain. "The only thing that seems to help is avoiding screen time before bed, especially social media. I also try to do some form of exercise during the day so that I am more likely to sleep at night." She manages her migraine and fatigue with painkillers and caffeine to get through the workday.

Others are overhauling their lifestyles to improve their sleep quality. Hospitality professional Anahita Nair has struggled with sleep since she was a child. "It worsened in my late 20s and continues in my early 30s, with adulting and the grief of losing my dad when I was 30 further affecting my sleep," says the 32-year-old marketing head of a global hotel chain in Hyderabad. Light dinners, sleeping early and a leisurely start with a nourishing breakfast helps her energy levels during the day. She avoids socialising on weeknights, and prefers relaxing weekends. Reading before bedtime and during her car rides to work helps clear her mind and have a more restful day and sleep.

Dr. Nileena advises sticking to the same sleep schedule on weekdays and weeknights, as differing schedules can disrupt the regularity and quality of sleep schedules. She also encourages people to identify their chronotypes—the individual preference for when we are the most alert and productive and when we sleep best, a reflection of our own circadian rhythm.

"One should ideally prioritise work and rest around their chronotype." However, this can be difficult with traditional office hours and social schedules. If lifestyle changes are not helping, seek professional help, advises Dr. Nileena.

One thing Coutinho makes clear is that one cannot catch up on a sleep deficit overnight. "The body needs consistent, quality sleep to function optimally," says Coutinho. "The more mindful you are about sleep discipline, the better you'll perform—at work and in life."



MONDAY MOTIVATION

## 'Hate your heroes to change for the better'

Architecture Discipline's Akshat Bhatt on mentorship and being a metalhead

Shail Desai

**B**efore he donned the architect's hat, Akshat Bhatt played the guitar, which made him a metal-head for life. Today, he's found a link between his architecture practice and his love for the progressive metal genre, djent.

"This form of music is intense and honest. It requires rigour and you cannot fake it. I believe those fundamentals are also true for architecture," says Delhi-based Bhatt, 45, principal architect and founder of Architecture Discipline, a multi-disciplinary practice behind projects like Mana Hotel in Rajasthan, the Discovery Centre in Bengaluru, and the Make in India Pavilion at the Hannover Messe in Germany.

In an interview with *Lounge*, he talks about mentorship and why he encourages collaboration on all his projects. Edited excerpts:

### Who do you consider your mentor?

"I don't think I have a mentor; I have many influences. I believe if you have a few influences, you'll become a derivative of those and if you have hundreds of influences, you'll become an original. My professional influences started with deconstructivism, which was a progressive modern movement, and then I moved to high modernists in great detail for reverence and for criticism. You must love your heroes, but you also learn to hate them because otherwise you can't make an evolutionary change."

**An insight you worked on with your mentor's guidance?**

You have to build for the right reasons and with the right narratives. These narratives keep evolving. Our conversations over the last few years have been revolving around sustainability, but we should also talk about patterns of consumption.

**What does being a mentor mean to you?**

I encourage collaboration on all projects, both within the design studio and with co-architects, consultants, clients and specialists. The practice fosters young architects and promotes the "Think Tank" philosophy. Weekly design meetings are held every Monday to provide a vital forum for the discussion of current competitions and ongoing projects, and to create a platform for creativity and new solutions appropriate to each design. We work in a completely open-plan office with democratic beliefs. This collegiate approach extends to the broader world with a constitution that consciously brings a moral dimension to our work. This includes a staff sharing scheme and contributions to charity.

**Any book or podcast you would recommend about mentorship and growth?**

It is important to read about your value systems. Skills can be taught but character takes a long time to build. I would recommend reading *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand, 1984 by George Orwell, and *Darwin's Theory of Evolution*.

**How do you unwind?**

I play the guitar at earth shattering volumes to unwind.

Monday Motivation is a series in which business leaders discuss their mentors and their work ethics. Write to us at [feedback@livemint.com](mailto:feedback@livemint.com)

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# Be goal-oriented, not task-focused, to get ahead at work

Reliable workers are often taken for granted. Strategic changes like highlighting your work can change the game

Geetika Sachdev

**S**hruti Mehta, a content strategist at a Mumbai advertising agency, takes on any task assigned to her, even if she has too much on her plate. She describes herself as a "workhorse" but complains that it has not helped her career as she has not been promoted in three years. "Despite being a reliable resource and never refusing any task, my boss has always preferred others who don't put in as much work but deliver big wins. That's something I lack," she says.

Thomas Edison's famous line, "There's no substitute for hard work", has long served as a guiding principle. While perseverance and sincerity are crucial for professional growth, hard work alone cannot guarantee success anymore.

"The marketplace and ecosystem are evolving rapidly and experience alone is not enough to keep up with these changes.

While experience provides valuable lessons, it can become obsolete if not complemented by new knowledge and skills," says Srinivas Krishnan, managing director (South Asia) at global logistics company, Crown Worldwide Group.

Hard workers are typically task-oriented and may show little interest in anything beyond immediate responsibilities. So they assume the role of "reliable troubleshooters", who can consistently put in the hours needed to complete their work.

"However, their sense of achievement is closely tied to their completion of tasks, which can lead them to invest less in their own professional development," points out Roma Puri, associate professor and area chair (organisational behaviour and human resources), International Management Institute, Kolkata. "Organisations might prefer to keep these individuals in their current roles rather than promote them."

## BEYOND LONG HOURS

With the advancement of technology and change in industry practices, strategic planning, time management and measurable outcomes are more likely to determine career progress. "Professionals must recognise what worked in the past may no



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longer be relevant. Knowledge quickly becomes outdated, making continuous upskilling essential," adds Krishnan. "The ability to learn, unlearn and relearn is crucial to get ahead at work." Reports say that in as little as five to seven years, many current jobs will be replaced by new

ones," says Mumbai-based Bhakti Talati, a work-life balance coach.

At the same time, employees must have the confidence to highlight their victories throughout the year, instead of only during promotion periods.

This approach helped Kolkata-based

Shweta Pritam. Until last year, the marketing professional, 32, paid little to no attention to highlighting her achievements. Juniors in her organisation had got promotions but she had not.

"I decided to spotlight my wins every month, making sure I put out my hard work upfront without sounding boastful. Fortunately, I have been able to grab the attention of my seniors with this approach. I have received a pay hike as well as a change in designation," she says. Puri's advice to elevate one's status within an organisation is to make the shift from being seen as "just reliable to candidates for new projects."

## CHANGE THE NARRATIVE

Workhorses often go unnoticed, but with some strategic changes, they can gain recognition. For one, employees could refrain from being available 24x7 since it creates a perception that their time is not important.

"Workhorses may be used to taking on tasks promptly at any hour of the day but it has an opposite impact. Their presence is then taken for granted," says Talati. Setting firm time and workload boundaries is key.

They must develop the habit of highlighting their impact in professional tasks,

and must step out of their comfort zone and upgrade their skills to take on more challenging assignments.

Talati also says they should be mindful of the kind of assignments they pick, assessing the scope of work and its importance in their overall growth within the company.

"It is possible that seniors or colleagues may take advantage of their 'saying yes' tendency to push on execution-intensive tasks. Hard workers need to use their skills to their strengths," says Talati.

Building a personal brand is another way to be in the spotlight. From contributing to the company newsletter to sharing insights in town hall meetings or even posting industry-related content on LinkedIn, the options are plenty.

Knowing when to pitch ideas and how to present them is also significant. "Workhorses should focus on articulating their thoughts clearly and choosing the right moments to contribute," says Krishnan. "The ability to analyse situations, solve problems and think creatively is a major differentiator. Developing intellectual capacity through continuous effort helps professionals navigate challenges effectively."

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