Pursuing the 'perfect sleep'

Is 'sleepmaxxing' trend a helpful hack or just an unhealthy hype?

The Star Malaysia · 14 May 2025 · 1 · By BETTINA LUKE

MORE energy, less stress, a better mood and stronger immune system – these are some of the purported benefits of "sleepmaxxing," a viral wellness trend aimed at maximising the quality and quantity of a person's sleep.



The tips touted on Tiktok and other social media platforms are both conventional and unusual, including:

> Taping your mouth shut

> Not drinking anything during the two hours before bedtime

> Having a cool, dark sleep environment

> Using a white noise machine > Not setting an alarm clock > Eating kiwi fruit before going to bed

> Using weighted blankets > Meditating daily for 30 minutes

Eric Zhou, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School in the United States city of Boston, has lectured internationally on sleep health and recently wrote an article on sleep-maxxing in the publication Harvard Health ."Allofuscan benefit from following basic sleep hygiene tips," he says.

His overall assessment of sleepmaxxing? Many of the influencer-recommended strategies are backed by plenty of research, while others are based on limited scientific data or lack any evidence at all.

As for the "concept" of sleepmaxxing "as a defined package," it hasn't been scientifically studied, he says.

Get some rest

Regularly getting restful sleep is essential to mental and physical health, improves appearance and boosts creativity, says the German Sleep Foundation, which promotes knowledge transfer along with interdisciplinary initiatives and projects in the field of sleep health.

Among the common hacks that Zhou says help many people enjoy restful sleep are:

> Reducing caffeine and alcohol consumption

> Limiting evening screen time > Maintaining a regular bedtime and rise time

> Having a cool, dark sleep environment

> Increasing morning light exposure and decreasing evening light exposure

These habits are also recommended by the German Sleep Foundation and German Sleep Society (DGSM), a scientific-medical society focused on the research of sleep and its pathologies as well as on the clinical diagnosis and therapy of sleepwake disorders.

Limited data

Among the sleepmaxxing strategies for which Zhou says scientific data are limited are:

> Mouth-taping: Tiktok users have claimed that sleeping with your mouth taped has benefits such as reducing snoring and improving bad breath. But Zhou says a team from the Department of Otolaryngology at George Washington University in Washington DC reviewed research on the practice and found that most of the claims are unsupported.

Even if taping your mouth does reduce your snoring, it doesn’t address any potential medical condition that causes it. So you should see a doctor.

> Weighted blankets: The gentle pressure they exert on the body is said to be very comforting. While intriguing research has been done on weighted blankets, Zhou says there’s no convincing evidence that they are truly effective for the general adult population.

> Early bedtime: Many videos claim it’s best to be asleep by 10pm or earlier. Individual chronotypes, or circadian rhythms, are so varied though, says Zhou, that it’s difficult to state there’s an ideal bedtime for everyone.

And people’s varying personal and professional responsibilities impact their sleep schedule.

> Eating kiwi fruit before going to bed: Zhou points to a small Taiwanese study of 24 people in 2011 suggesting that kiwi fruit may improve sleep. He notes that it wasn’t a randomised controlled trial, however, and should therefore be taken with a grain of salt. Zhou also says that much of the drug response for sleep medications in insomnia patients may be due to the placebo effect.

The pressure to get perfect sleep

“Embedded in the sleepmaxxing culture,” Zhou says, is the pressure to get perfect sleep. But it’s an unrealistic goal: “Even good sleepers vary from night to night, experiencing less than desirable sleep a couple of times per week,” he remarks.

Sleepmaxxers could develop orthosomnia, a term he describes as “an unhealthy pursuit of perfect sleep.” Stressing yourself about sleeping well, and sleeping well, don’t mix.

“A good first step is to understand whether or not there’s anything that you need to fix,” says Zhou. To get a “reasonable assessment” of this, he suggests tracking your sleep for a few weeks using a sleep diary and combining this information with data from a consumer wearable.

The sleep experts at DGSM advises gathering the following information:

> How much sleep do you get per night?

> Are you satisfied with your sleep?

> How much sleep did you get in the last 24 hours?

> How easily can you fall asleep and sleep through the night?

> Do you have a regular bedtime and rise time?

> Can you concentrate well and remain alert during the day?

If it takes you 30 minutes or more to fall asleep or you’re up for 30 minutes or more in the middle of the night, and this happens three or more times per week, then you should see a health professional, Zhou says. The Sleep Foundation agrees, because “you can do something about sleep problems. There are many treatment methods, some of them new.” – dpa