



## The seven sleep killers

Police officers have different sleeping needs and requirements compared to non-sworn. Oftentimes, because there are so few clinical personnel who truly understand what we go through on a daily basis, our rest-related problems (and other problems that result from poor sleep) may not be properly identified or diagnosed for treatment. Because we have very few effective resources at our disposal, we may be in danger of hurting ourselves throughout the longevity of our careers. It becomes important to both understand (back in the “good-old” days) what good sleep is (or was), and to also identify the sleep problems that each one of us potentially face. By understanding the components that should comprise sleep, and by learning to identify the problems that we suffer from, we can subsequently set goals to conquer these issues. Even though the nature and requirements of our profession may not enable us to always get the best sleep possible, the subject matter of this article may assist to enable us to improve our rate and quality of sleep.

There are seven different types of rest-related problems that police officers experience. They may occur individually or in combinations. They all lead to the same result: They can potentially impact your mind, your body, your daily activities, your work productivity and can also lead to early death. We want you to know that effective solutions exist. But to solve the problems, we’ll first need to understand them. Let’s identify these seven sleep problems that face police officers:

**No. 1:** You may fail to give your body and mind the minimum required number of hours of rest that you need. Total sleep is composed of *several* back-to-back cycles of both rapid eye movement (REM, where dreaming occurs) and non-REM sleep (deep sleep). You need to allow yourself to reach a state of deep sleep, and you also need to allow yourself to reach a minimum number of back-to-back cycles (minimum of three, four or five, depending on your individual needs) in order to rebuild and prepare yourself for your next day. It is important to both identify and recognize the effects that failing to attain your minimum (or greater than your minimum) number of cycles may have, especially when you begin to feel sick or rundown. Be sure to write these symptoms down and share them with your doctor during your clinical checkups.

**No. 2:** Your work schedule may conflict with your body’s natural tendencies to want to wake up when the sun rises and want to sleep when the moon rises. We are born with an internal clock, which is set by nature. Put simply, from birth we are designed to wake up in the morning and go

to bed at night. After 20-plus years of doing this, we entered a vocation that may require us to fight against this conditioning. We can't pick our work schedule, so, unfortunately, we must engage in our sleep as best as we can. To maximize your sleep, make sure to: turn off the TV at least one hour prior to sleeping; purchase and install ultra-dark shades and blinds in your bedroom; invest in a good mattress and pillows; don't go to bed mad—meditate/count sheep/kiss someone good night!

**No. 3:** Your work schedule may require you to force your body to sleep daytime hours one day, followed by night hours the very next day, and so on. This is point No. 2, above, flip-flopped between days and nights. Again, we cannot always control our work schedule, but we must recognize the impact that it has on our minds and bodies. Never underestimate the importance of a daily vitamin, and try not to eat heavy meals before you hit the sack.

**No. 4:** You may attempt to assist your body in sleeping and waking up by resorting to sleep aids and caffeine/energy drinks, thus negatively impacting your body and mind's natural resting triggers throughout your career. This is what happens: You wake up tired, so you condition yourself to drink coffee. With your coffee, if you indulge in whole milk and sugar, you expose your body to calories on a daily basis, and this leads to other issues. You may rely on energy drinks to help you throughout the day; however, they also pose potentially harmful and negative consequences to you. Lastly, if you rely on sleep medications or alcohol to help ease your tensions and allow you to sleep, know that there are potential harms. We have an excellent in-house health wellness team, the American eHealth Collaborative, that will gladly help you to gradually reduce your intake of such harmful items and replace these with healthier habits. Contact Jimmy Baldea at [JB@AmericanEHealth.com](mailto:JB@AmericanEHealth.com) for details.

**No. 5:** When you do attempt to sleep, your quality of sleep may not be good. For those of us who need to drop a few pounds, we may suffer from sleep apnea (or precursors to sleep apnea). We may also be impacted by other factors that attack our quality of sleep. Subtle improvements in your diet may help. Start by drinking more water daily, and maybe squeeze a lemon or lime into it every once in a while. Replace table salt with either pink salt (much better than white salt), or gradually switch to white or black pepper for seasoning. Gotta start somewhere! Again, not to say that improving your diet will 100 percent help your quality of sleep... it's your body, so you need to start experimenting and changing various factors, one by one, to determine what works best for you as an individual.

**No. 6:** You may have a pre-existing condition or one that was acquired during the course of your career, which medically prevents you from sleeping well. Police officers are a special breed—we will knowingly put ourselves in the line of danger to help others, even if it means that we do so at our own expense. Because of our integrity, we sometimes “tough it out” throughout our lives and both into and throughout our careers. By realizing and admitting that we may have clinical ailments, we can take the steps necessary to conquer our ailments. We owe this to ourselves and those we love and who love us. If you have skipped out on doctor visits and annual checkups, take a moment now to call and schedule a visit with your doctor!

**No. 7:** Stress. Bringing your work home with you will have a negative impact on your sleep. Upsetting the people you live with will further magnify your stress. Stress and lack of sleep

have a compounding, brutal impact on people's bodies. For those of us who have made arrests at the tail end of our workday, then have to spend several additional hours in processing, then have tried to drive home (with only one eye open due to fatigue), swerving, then suddenly waking up (breathing heavily) with an ultra-high heartbeat while behind the steering wheel—it's not worth it... take a nap!

*And then you retire.* What happens next? Upon retiring, you'll need to retrain yourself (and perhaps also retrain the person with whom you share a bed with) on how to sleep. The importance of retiring healthy begins at the start of your career. Younger officers need to develop healthful habits and need to continue with a regiment of proper dieting and regular exercise.

I'm here to help. Feel free to call me at (661) 510-6129 or email me at [MarkCronin@Lappl.org](mailto:MarkCronin@Lappl.org).