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### Don't Sleep on This

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# Don't Sleep on This

IN 1986, 27-YEAR-OLD ROBERT MCDONALD STAYED AWAKE FOR 18 DAYS, 21 HOURS AND 40 MINUTES. AS A PROFESSIONAL STUNTMAN, MCDONALD HAD JUMPED MOTORCYCLES AND CLIMBED MOUNTAINS, BUT THIS WAS PERHAPS THE MOST CHALLENGING AND DANGEROUS ENDEAVOR OF HIS LIFE.

McDonald's record survives to this day, not because of how incredible it was but because Guinness World Records stopped monitoring the feat in 1997. One reason for this was the discovery of "microsleeps," or lapses into sleep lasting only a few seconds. Many now believe that McDonald and other previous record holders likely experienced microsleeps that weren't observed. Another reason was due to the existence of fatal familial insomnia, a rare genetic disorder causing hallucinations, dementia and eventually death. Victims typically survive for several months without sleep, making someone suffering from the disorder the inevitable record holder but certainly no cause for celebration.

Ultimately, the record is no longer tracked because mountains of research show that sleep is fundamental to all aspects of human performance and forgoing it can wreak havoc on our health.

Adequate sleep is a key component of our physical wellness. It's known to regulate hormone functions, assisting in appetite control, muscle development and intentional fat loss. It also bolsters the immune system, aiding the prevention of common illnesses, like colds and flu, as well as cancer, heart attacks, stroke and diabetes.

In addition, sleep is essential to our brain health, improving mood, creativity and decision-making. The effects of sleep on memory and learning are particularly well understood, with deep sleep leading to the synthesis of information and the transfer of memories from short-term to long-term storage. It also helps us process the emotions related to experiences from the day, taking the edge off

embarrassment, anger and sadness, so the adage of "just sleep on it" rings true.

Science is just catching up to what our Creator has known all along. In 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4, Paul likens death to sleep three times, giving insights on the events of Christ's second coming. Our nightly slumber serves as a type of earthly death. We rest quietly and at peace, disconnected from the troubles of the world, and wake to find ourselves renewed. And so it is with death; God's followers rest until His return, when they will awake in bodies and minds made perfect and whole.

Sleep is yet another example of God's perfect design. A delightful break from the worries of the day that not only improves how we think and feel but points toward His soon return. Perhaps it's time we truly cherished such an extraordinary gift from our Maker. ■

*Rachel Keele is director of University Wellness at Andrews University.*



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