

THE SATURDAY ESSAY | August 3, 2012, 7:26 p.m. ET

Decoding the Science of Sleep

 By DAVID K. RANDALL

In today's always-on economy, we're tired like never before. Caffeine and sleeping pills only do so much. How did we get this far away from our most basic, ancient habits? And how can we get back on track?

74%

People who drink a caffeinated beverage on an average weekday

Source: National Sleep Foundation

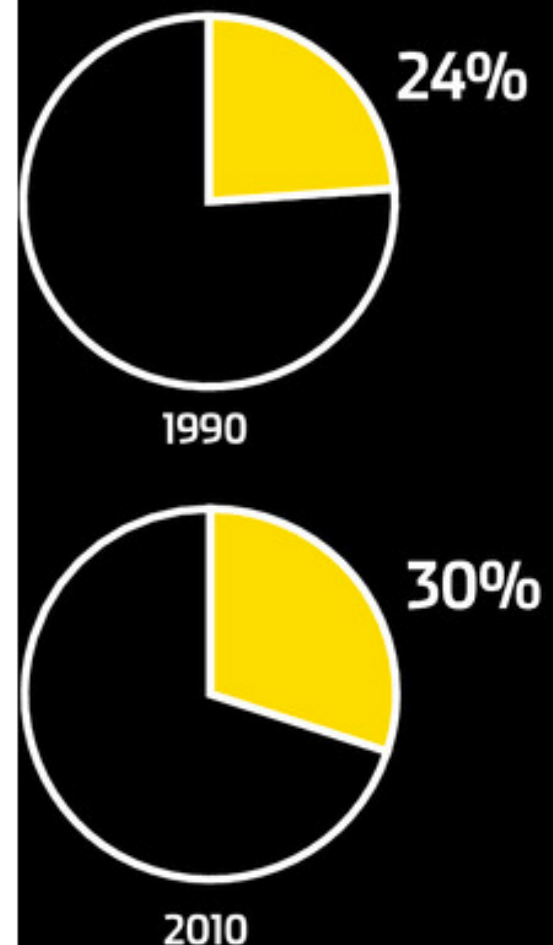


Zlatko Glusica was the captain of an Air India Express plane carrying 166 passengers from Dubai to Mangalore, a bustling port city on India's southern coast. As his Boeing 737 approached the city, Mr. Glusica woke up from a nap in the cockpit and took over the controls. His co-pilot warned him repeatedly that he was coming in at the wrong angle and that he should pull up and try again. The last sound on the cockpit recorder was the co-pilot screaming that they didn't have any runway left. The plane overshot the landing and burst into flames. Only eight people survived. An investigation found that the captain was suffering from "sleep inertia."

Sleep remains ingrained in our cultural ethos as something that can be put off, dosed or ignored.

A growing number of Americans don't get enough to stress, thanks to higher stress and other factors. David K. Randall, author of "Dreamland: Adventures in the Strange Science of Sleep," talks about the problem and some steps to improve sleep.

Percentage of U.S. workers getting less than six hours of sleep a night



Source: CDC