

New Evidence for Bingeing on Sleep Before a Big Race

By Paige Towers • May 5, 2016 at 6:21pm

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Rest doesn't come easy the night before a big event. Between the overall anticipation, performance anxiety and fear of sleeping through their alarms, many runners only log a few good hours of sleep before they have to lace up their running shoes. But this doesn't necessarily mean they're bound for the back of the pack: According to a new study published in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*

, pavement pounders who sleep poorly the night before a race won't feel the effects as badly if they've logged several consecutive nights of good shuteye in the prior week.

In running, as in all sports, there's no doubt that good sleep leads to good performance. ACSM researchers wanted to figure out whether a bad night of rest before a race could be "saved" if athletes logged a string of quality night's sleep beforehand.

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Researchers led by Pierrick J. Arnal of the Armed Forces Biomedical Institute monitored the performance of 12 healthy men after two bouts of sleep deprivation. The men slept as they normally would for six days (defined as 8.18.3 hours a night) and then were asked to stay up for 3437 hours. Later, the same men had another sixday stretch of normal sleep but logged an additional two hours of rest each night. They were asked to stay awake again the day afterwards. Before and after each stretch of sleep deprivation, the athletes performed a simple isometric knee extension until exhaustion.

Post sleep deprivation, endurance levels were significantly higher following the week of additional sleep than they were following the week of average sleep. In fact, after banking sleep, participants were able to hold the exercise on average almost nine minutes longer. (To no surprise, endurance levels were highest before they underwent sleep deprivation. So, nothing beat's a solid night's rest prerace.)

While the results of “more sleep equals better performance” are by no means groundbreaking, they do add to the growing dialogue around rest and athletic performance. And it helps to know that when you have an overactive mind before a race, there’s still hope of hitting that PR.