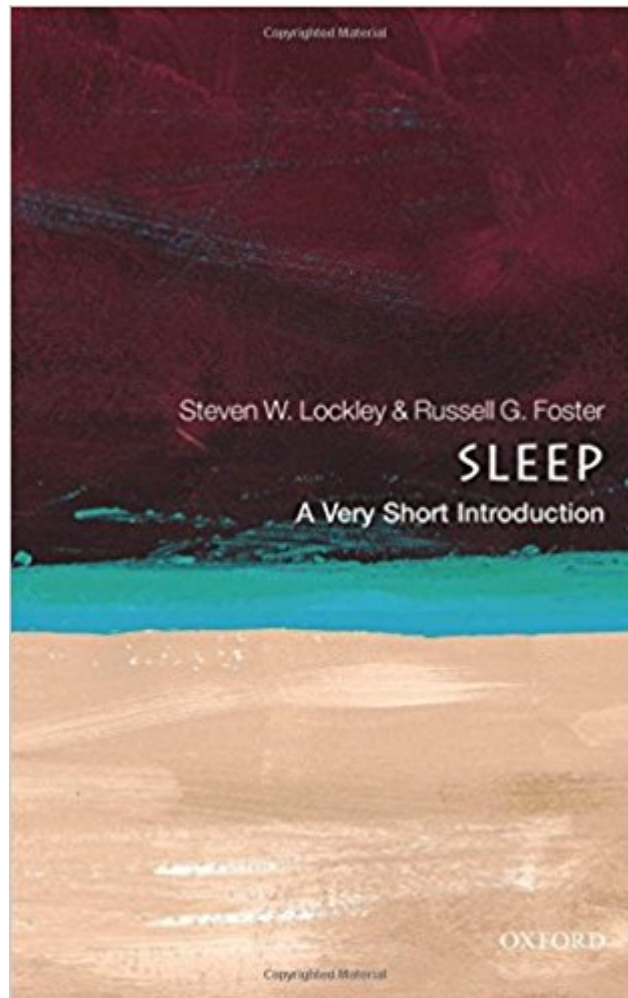




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Sleep: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Why do we need sleep? What is sleep? What happens when we don't get enough? This Very Short Introduction addresses the biological and psychological aspects of sleep, providing a basic understanding of what sleep is and how it is measured, a look at sleep through the human lifespan, and the causes and consequences of major sleep disorders. The book describes dramatic breakthroughs in our knowledge of how sleep occurs, what it does, and what happens to our health if we do not have enough. The authors consider the impact of modern society, examining the relationship between sleep and our 24/7 culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sleep takes up about one third of our lives. Therefore it is important to understand sleep and its pathologies. This book fully meets this requirement and is therefore recommended to all who want to gain some insight into a hidden but crucial part of being a human. As frankly stated in the book, many features of sleep and the factors shaping it are not really understood. A definition of sleep fitting comparable phenomena in all forms of life is lacking. And, most important of all, "The reasons why we sleep remain frustratingly unresolved" (p. 40). But some of the essential functions of human sleep are known. These include many biological ones. On the mental level, "In humans, procedural learning, declarative learning, and even higher-level "insights" " the process of mental restructuring in the brain, that leads to a sudden gain of understanding or explicit knowledge " have been shown to depend on sleep" (p. 52). Also, "sleep helps our brains find creative solutions" (p.1). All the more serious are the consequences of sleep deprivation and disturbances, as caused by a variety of pathologies; shift work; disruption of the natural day-night

cycle which is hardwired into humans by its evolutionary history, caused by modern 24 hour active, noisy and brightly lightened modern societies; and personal neglect of sleep requirements. This leads to a very important issue, not discussed in the book, namely the potentially serious consequences of sleep deprivation and disturbances by high level decision makers. The work schedule of political leaders increases the dangers of serious and sometimes catastrophic errors, especially in crisis situations. This is also the case when traveling through time zones, rushing from continent to continent for important meetings.

This is one book in a large series of books put out by the Oxford University Press. All of these "Very Short Introduction" books are brief summaries of the state of research on a given topic in the arts, sciences, or humanities. Based on this book, I'd say the series is geared toward a readership of educated non-specialists. I say "educated" because the book did get into some technical areas, and while it doesn't presume any particular knowledge of the science of sleep, it does use a scientific vocabulary with occasional academic sentences (i.e. packed with precise detail and lacking concern about readability.) That said, I'd say the readability is higher than the journal articles from which the information for the book was drawn. I suspect I'll read more from this series. They are cheap on Kindle, provide a concise injection of the basics for a wide range of topics, and are pleasantly readable if you're used to reading academic literature. This particular book is about sleep. While, on average, sleep takes up one-third of a person's life, it's a subject that is often taken for granted. Like water, one doesn't really think about it until one isn't getting enough. However, as the book discusses in detail, all sorts of problems are associated with sleep deprivation, insomnia, and parasomnias (i.e. sleep events like sleepwalking, night terrors, nightmares, bedwetting, sleep-eating, and groaning.) The book is written in nine chapters covering: the history of sleep, sleep generation and regulation, a brain on sleep, reasons we sleep, variation in sleep throughout one's life-cycle, the nature of poor sleep, the connection between sleep and health, and the effect of our shift to a round-the-clock society.

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