



# THE RISKS OF PULLING an all-nighter

BY STEVEN HOLBROOK FOR U.S. NEWS

Let's go back to my first semester at the University of Alabama. It was the night before my first collegiate final exam -- an introductory economics class, I think -- and I was, frankly, not ready for it. So, being a typical arrogant freshman, I thought, "Oh, no problem. I'll just pull an all-nighter, ace the test and be playing NBA 2K11 by lunchtime. Piece of cake."

Around 10 p.m., I gathered my sleep-warding weaponry (Red Bull, coffee, loud music and a

fan on full blast blowing right in my face) and proceeded to study. I did fine until about 12:30, when my eyelids began to droop slightly. But, after a few Red Bulls -- four, to be exact -- I was fine. And by that I mean I felt energized and alert enough to run a quick 5K, fight a bear or three, and still have time to get to class and ace my final. Energy drinks... that's a post for another day, folks.

Anyway, after my energy drink binge, I continued to study. Around 4 a.m., though, I knew I was reaching my limit. I could feel my mind shutting down, my body becoming increasingly weary. Still amid my empty Red Bull cans and notes, I leaned back, closed my eyes -- just for a minute, of course -- and, slowly, drifted... off... to...

I awoke suddenly to sunlight streaming through my blinds. I blearily looked at the alarm

clock on my bedside table. 9:04. Four minutes past the start time for my exam. Crap.

As I sprinted across campus, still barefoot and wearing the sweatpants and ratty t-shirt I slept in, to my exam, I couldn't help but think about how stupid my all-night cram session now seemed. After all, I couldn't prove how much I knew about Adam Smith's Invisible Hand if I wasn't present to take the test.

If my harrowing experience isn't enough to dissuade you from pulling an all-nighter to finish your 10-page paper that's due tomorrow, here are some facts that might: Your grades will be lower. Comparatively, at least. According to research from St. Lawrence University, students who never stayed up all night to study had an average GPA of 3.1, while those who regularly relied on the strategy only averaged a 2.9 GPA. This discrepancy is best explained by the effects of sleep deprivation. After all, bleariness, a splitting headache, forgetfulness and a general irritability can be distracting when you're trying to take a test.

Your memory gets worse. I'll say it again. Pulling an all-nighter actually makes your memory less functional. This is because sleep allows your brain time to repair and