

December 2014 – The Night Before Christmas

“Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In the hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there.”

Doesn't this well-known poem by Clement Moore bring back memories of childhood and the incredible pressure to get to sleep early to keep on the right side of Santa and one's parents!

The story continues...

“The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.

Mama in her kerchief and I in my cap, had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap.”

Well, there's no doubt that Mama and Papa had Parenting for Yuletide 101 sussed and realised the importance of getting a good night's sleep in anticipation of the mischief and mayhem to come!

I'd like to reinforce this message as we head into a week or 2 of madness and merriment, a time in which excess grog, late nights and long trips can create a potent mix, not conducive to the spirit of Christmas which should be one of joy and peace.

I've touched on a serious note, I know, and it kind of snuffs the magic of Moore but it may pay to know that the effect of sleep loss on how you perform has been compared to the effects of alcohol, and the results are stunning, so listen up! (*Thanks to BSS Psychological Services for their research on the subject here*):

- Stay awake for 17-18 hours and your performance will decrease to a level similar to having a blood alcohol level of 0.05%
- Take it to 20+ hours (that's 4 hours sleep for those already too tired and too sleep deprived to do the math!) and it notches up to 0.08%
- Throw in a hangover from the night before and the brain will start shaping to dial up and hit seriously S – L – O – W speeds with seriously negative repercussions!

Have I got you paying attention? I sincerely hope so.

Before I sign off for the month and for the year, let me quickly take you back to the night of March 24th, 1989 in which the Exxon Valdez ran aground, creating America's worst oil spill.

What most people don't know (and what I was surprised to learn in Dr. William Dement's excellent book *The Promise of Sleep*) is that the direct cause of the accident was not due to the behaviour of the captain and his widely reported consumption of alcohol, but due to the behaviour of the 3rd mate who had only slept 6 hours in the previous 48. He was severely sleep deprived!

So, what's the lesson in all this?

Aim to keep your sleep tank full (7-8 hours a night) as you ramp up the festive spirit and if you can't cos you're having such a wonderful time, take measures to ensure your safety and the safety of your fellow citizens!

"He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,

And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim, 'ere he drove out of sight,

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

My sentiments exactly!

See you when we turn the corner!