

SleepMatters

The importance of sleep on your physical well-being

Some people believe they need less sleep than the average person. While this may earn you bragging rights, it's not good for your health. Sleep is not just the absence of being awake; it's an active process that promotes good cognitive and physical health. While you're sleeping, your body is doing important work, such as forming pathways in your brain that help you learn and create memories and removing toxins that accumulate while you're awake. Sleep also helps your body support your immune system, repair cells and tissues and maintain a healthy balance of hormones.



Zzzzzs...How Many Do You Really Need?

It depends on your age, of course, but in general, adults need at least seven hours of sleep daily. Children need more. In fact, newborns sleep up to 17 hours a day. And your teenager—the one who seems to sleep the day away? He really does need 8 to 10 hours of sleep to support his growing body.



Sleep Is Important...and We're Not Getting Enough

Sleep deprivation is a serious public health problem. Roughly one out of three adults does not get at least seven hours of sleep each night. Insufficient sleep can affect all aspects of your life and raise your risk for serious disease. It can even be deadly. Here are a few ways sleep deprivation can be harmful.



Heart disease. Sleep helps your body repair the wear and tear on your heart and blood vessels. When you don't get enough sleep, it raises your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.

Diabetes. Lack of sleep can lead to higher-than-normal blood glucose (sugar) levels, increasing your risk for type 2 diabetes, which, in turn, raises your risk for heart disease.

Immune dysfunction. Without a robust immune system, you can't properly fight infection and prevent disease, and without adequate sleep, your immune system can't do its job.

Obesity. Sleep deficiency can lead to obesity, which is a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes and sleep apnea which also raises your risk for heart disease and diabetes.

Injury and accidents. Sleep deprivation can lead to deadly accidents and mistakes. Driver sleepiness plays a role in about 100,000 car accidents each year. Furthermore, several national catastrophes, including the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident and the Challenger spaceship explosion are all attributed, at least in part, to sleep deprivation.

Sleep Disorders

Unfortunately, sleep disorders are common. However, they are also very treatable once you are correctly diagnosed. The most common sleep disorders are insomnia and sleep apnea.



Insomnia. Insomnia—the inability to fall, or stay, asleep—is the most common sleep problem in those 60 and older. Treatments for insomnia include nonmedical approaches (for example, cognitive behavioral therapy and relaxation training) as well as medications.

Sleep apnea. If you snore and make gasping or choking noises during sleep, you may have obstructive sleep apnea, a disorder in which you momentarily stop breathing—sometimes many times per night—because of blocked airways. Nearly 24 million Americans have sleep apnea, many of them undiagnosed. People with sleep apnea wake up feeling tired and struggle with fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Once properly diagnosed, sleep apnea is treatable.

How Many Hours of Sleep Do You Need Each Day?

- (Newborns: 14–17
- (Infants (4–12 months): 12–16
- (Toddlers (1–2 years): 11–14
- (Preschoolers (3–5 years): 10–13
- (School Age (6–12 years): 9–12
- (Teens: 8–10
- (Adults: at least 7



ACTION ITEMS

Don't compromise your health! If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your primary care provider, who may refer you to a board-certified sleep specialist (a doctor with special training in sleep disorders) or recommend an in-lab or at-home sleep study to diagnose sleep apnea.