

AT - A - GLANCE :



Healthy Sleep

Sleep is not just a block of time when you are not awake. Thanks to sleep studies done over the past several decades, it is now known that sleep has distinctive stages that cycle throughout the night. Your brain stays active throughout sleep, but different things happen during each stage. For example, certain stages are needed to help you feel rested and energetic the next day, and other stages help you learn and make memories.

A number of vital tasks carried out during sleep help maintain good health and enable people to function at their best. On the other hand, not getting enough sleep can be dangerous for both your mental and physical health.

How Much Sleep Is Enough?

Sleep needs vary from person to person, and they change throughout the lifecycle. Most adults, including older adults, need 7–8 hours of sleep each night. Children have different sleep needs, depending on how old they are.

Why Sleep Is Good for You and Skimping Isn't

Not only does the quantity of your sleep matter, but also the quality is important as well. How well rested you are and how well you function the next day depend on your total sleep time and how much of the various stages of sleep you get each night.

Performance

We need to sleep to think clearly, react quickly, and create memories. In fact, the pathways in the brain that help us learn and remember are very active when we sleep.

Skimping on sleep has a price. Cutting back by even 1 hour can make it tough to focus the next day and slow your response time. Studies have shown that when you lack sleep, you are more likely to make bad decisions and take more risks. This can result in poor performance on the job or at school and a greater risk for an accident or car crash.

Mood

Sleep also affects mood. Insufficient sleep can make you irritable and is linked to poor behavior and trouble with relationships, especially among children and teens. People who chronically lack sleep are also more likely to become depressed.

Health

Sleep also is important for good health. Studies show that not getting enough sleep or getting poor quality sleep on a regular basis increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions. In addition, during sleep, your body produces valuable hormones. These hormones help children grow and help adults and children build muscle mass, fight infections, and repair cells. Hormones released during sleep also affect how the body uses energy. Studies find that the less people sleep, the more likely they are to be overweight or obese, develop diabetes, and prefer eating foods high in calories and carbohydrates.



Get a Good Night's Sleep

Like eating and being physically active, getting a good night's sleep is vital to your well-being. Here are a few tips to help you:

- Stick to a sleep schedule—Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.
- Don't exercise too late in the day.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed.
- Avoid large meals and beverages late at night.
- Don't take a nap after 3 p.m.
- Relax before bed—for example, take a hot bath.
- Create a good sleeping environment. Get rid of distractions such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or a TV or computer in the bedroom.
- See a doctor if you have continued trouble sleeping.

Talk with your doctor if you suspect you have a sleep disorder, such as insomnia, sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, or narcolepsy.

Learn More

More information on healthy sleep and sleep disorders is available from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) Web site at www.nhlbi.nih.gov (under Health Information for the Public). Podcasts and Spanish-language articles also can be found in the online Diseases and Conditions Index at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci.

You also can order or download information on healthy sleep from the NHLBI Web site or by calling the NHLBI Health Information Center at 301-592-8573 (TTY: 240-629-3255).

Want More Information? These NHLBI resources will help you get adequate sleep and manage sleep disorders!



Your Guide to Healthy Sleep (#06-5271)

This easy-to-read booklet provides the latest science-based information about sleep, including common sleep myths and practical tips for getting adequate sleep.

In Brief: Your Guide to Healthy Sleep (#06-5800)

Critical messages from "Your Guide to Healthy Sleep" are provided in this easy-to-read fact sheet.



Also of interest:

• Sleep Disorders Fact Sheets

The online Diseases and Conditions Index (DCI) has fact sheets on insomnia, narcolepsy, restless legs syndrome, and sleep apnea, as well as information on sleep-related tests and procedures. Download at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci.

• Visit the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research

Web site at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncsdr/index.htm> for an interactive "sleep IQ" quiz and publications and resources on sleep disorders research.



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