

Healthy Sleep Guide: Getting a Good Night's Rest



Health and Wellness

Sleep plays a vital role in achieving good health and overall wellbeing.

During sleep, your body is working to support healthy brain function and maintain physical health. Not only does sleep deficiency leave you feeling groggy and sluggish, it can also affect how well you think, react, work, learn and get along with others.

What is Sleep?

The medical community used to consider sleep as a uniform block of time when the human body was simply not awake. Over the last several decades, sleep studies have revealed that the brain remains active during this time. Additionally, sleep has several different stages that cycle during the night. The brain's activity changes in each stage of the sleep cycle. For example, certain sleep stages help the brain to learn and make memories, while others are needed in order to feel well-rested and energetic the following day.

How Much Sleep Do I Need?

Everyone needs a unique amount of sleep to feel rested and refreshed each day. The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) recommends that adults ages 18-64 achieve seven to nine hours of sleep per night. However, most adults in the United States are not satisfying their bodies' sleep needs.

Sleep and Age

Some people believe that adults need less sleep as they age. There is no evidence showing that older adults require less sleep than younger adults. According to the NIH, as people age, they often get less sleep. Older adults also tend to spend less time in the deep sleep stages that produce a rested feeling.

Sleep and Growth

During sleep, the body produces hormones that are necessary for the proper functioning of many bodily processes. Deep sleep triggers the brain to release increased amounts of growth hormone. As you might have guessed, this is the same hormone which fuels growth in children. It is also important for building muscle mass and repairing tissue and cells in both children and adults.

Sleep and Disease Risk

Getting enough sleep is vital for maintaining good health.

Research links sleep deprivation to increased risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and other medical conditions. During sleep, the body also releases increased amounts of infection-fighting hormones. This might help to explain why a good night's rest seems to speed recovery when you get sick.

Sleep and Metabolism

The average adult needs at least 7.5 hours of sleep each night to regulate the hormones that control metabolism and appetite. Not getting enough sleep prevents this regulation from taking place. As a result, metabolic rate decreases. The body naturally receives energy from two sources: sleep and calories from food. When the body lacks energy from sleep, it is predisposed to seek energy from food, which increases appetite and can cause weight gain or even overeating.

Sleep and Work Performance

Lost sleep can also affect your work performance. You are more likely to make mistakes and become injured. Workers who operate motor vehicles or whose jobs directly affect the health and safety of others should take extra care to get

Continued on back



Healthy Sleep Guide:

Getting a Good Night's Rest (*continued*)

enough sleep, as their mistakes may cause the injury or even death of other people. Missed sleep may result in:

- Increased irritability and anger
- Stress and feelings of anxiousness
- Pessimism
- Fatigue
- Feelings of dissatisfaction with life
- Impaired concentration and decision-making

Tips For a Better Night's Sleep

According to a study conducted by the Better Sleep Council in April 2013, half of Americans stated they don't get enough sleep. Surprisingly, the cure for sleep difficulties can likely be found in your daily routine. Your sleep schedule, bedtime habits and everyday routine can make a huge difference in the quality of your nightly rest. The following tips will help improve your sleep so you can be productive, sharp, emotionally balanced and feeling energized all day long.

- **Get outside.** Exposure to daylight is key to regulating the circadian rhythms that control daily sleep patterns. Experts recommend going outside in natural sunlight for a minimum of 30 minutes each day.
- **Create a routine.** Maintain a regular bedtime and waking time, even on the weekends. This will help you strengthen the circadian rhythms that regulate your sleep pattern.
- **“Set the mood” in your bedroom.** Make sure your bedroom is conducive to good sleep. It should be cool, dark, quiet, comfortable and free from interruptions. You should sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow. Eliminate things from your room that might inhibit your sleep like televisions, computers or anything related to work.
- **Keep naps short, sweet and early.** Naps have been shown to boost brain function. However, late afternoon naps – meaning anything after 3 p.m. – can cause difficulty falling asleep later that night. Additionally, keep naps under an hour.
- **Exercise in the afternoons.** A great remedy for sleepiness is exercise. The best time of day to exercise is late afternoon. When you work out at that time, you still have energy and by bedtime your body has cooled down and is ready for rest.
- **Stay away from caffeine and nicotine.** The stimulating effects of the caffeine found in energy drinks, coffee, teas, soda and even chocolate can linger for as long as 8 hours. Nicotine is also a stimulant, and should be avoided for 2 to 3 hours before heading to bed.
- **Avoid medicines that disrupt sleep.** This includes various over-the-counter and herbal medications for colds, coughs and allergies as well as some commonly prescribed blood pressure, heart and asthma medications.
- **Stop eating 3 hours before bedtime.** When and what you eat before your bedtime greatly affects how you will sleep that night. Try not to eat anything 2-3 hours before your regular bedtime, but have a light snack to ease hunger pains if you need it.
- **Take time to relax.** To help you fall asleep, take time to relax just before bedtime. Take a bath, read a book, breathe deeply or do something else that will put your mind at ease and help you transition into a good night's sleep.
- **Do not lie in bed, wide awake.** If you are still awake after lying in bed for more than 20 minutes, get up and engage in something relaxing until you feel tired again. Remaining in bed could cause you to become anxious about not being able to sleep, resulting in even more difficulty getting your full night's rest.
- **Know when to see a doctor.** If you find yourself feeling drowsy or fatigued throughout the day, even though you are getting enough sleep each night, you could have a sleep disorder. Contact your primary care physician, family doctor or a sleep specialist for help.

Sources: National Sleep Foundation; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Please note: The information provided in this document is intended for educational purposes only. Readers with questions or a need for further assistance are strongly encouraged to contact BHS at the website listed below.



Better begins today.
844-405-8200

MyBHS Portal portal.BHSONline.com | ID: MYMDCARES