

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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The Link Between Sleep and Health

Fewer Z-z-z-z-z's Could Mean More LBs

Research published by National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute has shown that missing even a few hours of sleep here and there cannot only affect your health but can also have a direct effect on your weight.

Physical Affects

That's because sleep helps maintain a healthy balance of the hormones that make you feel hungry (ghrelin) or full (leptin). When you don't get enough sleep, your levels of ghrelin go up and leptin go down. This can make you feel hungrier than you really are, which can make you eat more than you need to.¹

Sleep also affects how your body reacts to insulin, which controls your blood glucose (sugar) level. Not getting enough sleep results in a higher than normal blood sugar level, which may increase your risk for diabetes.²

Naturally, sleep affects growth and development. Deep sleep triggers the body to release the hormone that promotes normal growth in children and teens. This hormone boosts muscle mass and helps repair cells and tissues, which is why children and teens generally need more sleep than adults.³

Adults need good sleep as well to give the body time to engage in cell regeneration and healing. Sleep also facilitates recovery from injuries more quickly as a result of the benefits it provides to the immune system.⁴

Brain and Mental Health

Sleep also plays an important role in your brain and mental health. While you're sleeping, your brain is preparing for the next day. A good night's sleep can help enhance learning and problem-solving skills. It also helps you pay attention, make decisions and be creative.⁵

A lack of sleep can alter activity in some parts of the brain that control emotions

and behavior. People who don't get enough sleep may have problems getting along with others. They may also feel impulsive, have mood swings, have trouble paying attention, lack motivation or feel more stress.⁶

Dangerous Health Effects

Sleep deprivation can be dangerous to your health in other ways. This situation is compounded by the fact that some people may not even realize that they are sleep deficient and may still think they can function well even when they can't.

For example, drowsy drivers may think they are capable of driving. Yet studies show that sleep deficiency can affect your ability to drive as much as, or even more than, being drunk. It is estimated that driver sleepiness is a factor in about 100,000 car accidents each year, resulting in about 1,500 deaths.⁷

How Much Sleep Is Enough?

The amount of sleep you need each day changes over the course of your life. Although sleep needs vary from person to person, the chart below shows general recommendations for different age groups.⁸

Age	Recommended Amount of Sleep
Newborns	16–18 hours a day
Preschool-aged children	11–12 hours a day
School-aged children	At least 10 hours a day
Teens	9–10 hours a day
Adults (including the elderly)	7–8 hours a day

Building a Strong Foundation

Sleep is the foundation of a healthy mind and body. Sleeping well makes us more likely to succeed at our day-to-day tasks enjoy life more. When you get a good night's rest, you prepare yourself for the day ahead. You're much more likely to handle life's challenges with clear eyes and a fresh mind. Make it a priority to get a good night's rest and the benefits will become apparent.

Managing Sleep Naturally

There are simple things you can do to manage your sleep naturally, without the aid of sleep medication. Here are some tips for getting better sleep⁹:

- **Schedule your sleep:** set a regular bedtime and wake-up time.
- **Avoid caffeine:** if sensitive to caffeine, try not to drink it at least six to eight hours before bedtime.

- **Start relaxing before bedtime:** wind down by taking a bath, reading or listening to music.
- **Make your bedroom 100 percent for sleeping:** don't pay bills or work in bed, and make your bedroom pleasing and comfortable.
- **Exercise regularly:** working out may help you sleep but not if done right before bed. (Make sure to talk to your doctor before significantly increasing your activity level.)
- **Unplug:** for good sleep hygiene, turn off your electronic devices about one hour prior to turning in for the night. Read a book instead.¹⁰

If these activities don't help, or if you feel tired even when you get enough sleep, see your doctor.

Signs & Symptoms of Sleep Problems

If you have trouble getting your z-z-z's, you're not alone. According to a recent poll, nearly seven out of 10 Americans say they experience frequent sleep problems. Nearly two-thirds say they lose sleep because of stress.¹¹

How sleepy you feel during the day can help you figure out whether you're having sleep problems. You might be sleep deficient if you often feel like you could doze off while¹²:

- Sitting and reading or watching TV
- Sitting still in a public place, such as a movie theater, meeting or classroom
- Riding in a car for an hour without stopping
- Sitting and talking to someone
- Sitting quietly after lunch
- Sitting in traffic for a few minutes

To find out whether you're sleep deficient, keep a sleep diary for a couple of weeks. Write down how much you sleep each night, how alert and rested you feel in the morning, and how sleepy you feel during the day.¹³

Compare the amount of time you sleep each day with the average amount of sleep recommended for your age group as shown in the chart above. If you often feel sleepy and efforts to increase your sleep don't help, talk with your doctor.

Resources

www.liveandworkwell.com

Do a search under “sleep” for access to the Sleep Center where you will find links to useful resources, videos, news and related articles. Ask your health benefits representative for your access code to liveandworkwell.com.

¹ National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NIH), “Why Is Sleep Important,” <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/why>. Accessed June 20, 2015.

² Ibid, NIH, “Why Is Sleep Important.”

³ Ibid, NIH, “Why Is Sleep Important.”

⁴ Terry Crump, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist.

⁵ Ibid, NIH, “Why Is Sleep Important.”

⁶ Ibid, NIH, “Why Is Sleep Important.”

⁷ Ibid, NIH, “Why Is Sleep Important.”

⁸ National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NIH), “How Much Sleep Is Enough,” <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/why>. Accessed June 20, 2015.

⁹ HelpGuide.org, <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/how-to-sleep-better.htm>. Accessed May 28, 2015.

¹⁰ Terry Crump, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist.

¹¹ Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association). “Get Enough Sleep.” <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/get-enough-sleep>. Accessed April 15, 2015.

¹² Ibid, NIH, “How Much Sleep Is Enough.”

¹³ Ibid, NIH, “How Much Sleep Is Enough.”

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