

The Power of Sleep



Many of us feel like we have to pack all our activities in a day and sacrifice a few hours of sleep. But just as exercise and nutrition are essential for optimal health and happiness, so is sleep. The quality of your sleep directly affects the quality of your waking life, including your mental sharpness, productivity, emotional balance, creativity, and even your weight. No other activity delivers so many benefits with so little effort!

How Much Sleep Do I Need?

While sleep requirements vary slightly from person to person, **most healthy adults need between 7.5 to 9 hours of sleep per night to function at their best.**

What Happens if I Don't Get Enough Sleep?

- Fatigue, lethargy, and lack of motivation
- Moodiness and irritability
- Reduced creativity and problem-solving skills
- Inability to cope with stress
- Reduced immunity; frequent colds and infections
- Concentration and memory problems
- Weight gain
- Impaired motor skills and increased risk of accidents
- Difficulty making decisions
- Increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, and other health problems



Reducing sleep by as little as one and a half hours for just one night reduces daytime alertness by about one-third.

How Can I Improve the Quality and Quantity of My Sleep?

1. **Avoid watching TV, eating, and discussing emotional issues in bed.** The bed should be used for sleep and sex only or else we associate the bed with other activities making it harder to fall asleep.
2. **Minimize noise, light, and temperature extremes** during sleep with ear plugs, window blinds, or an electric blanket or air conditioner. Keep your bedroom between 54 -75 degrees.
3. **Try not to drink fluids after 8 p.m.** This may reduce awakenings due to urination.
4. **Avoid naps**, but if you do nap, make it no more than about 25 minutes about eight hours after you awake. But if you have problems falling asleep, then don't take one!
5. **Nicotine is a stimulant and should be avoided** particularly near bedtime. Although it may feel relaxing, a smoke before bed is actually putting a stimulant into your blood.
6. **Caffeine should be discontinued 4-6 hours before bedtime.** Caffeine is also a stimulant and is present in coffee (100-200 mg), soda (50-75 mg), and tea (50-75 mg).
7. Although **alcohol** is a depressant, the subsequent metabolism that clears it from your body causes a withdrawal syndrome. This causes awakenings and is often associated with nightmares and sweats.
8. **Milk** contains the amino acid L-tryptophan, which has been shown in research to help people go to sleep. So milk and a piece of toast may be useful to help you fall asleep.

Resources: <http://www.medicinenet.com/>, <http://helpguide.org/>