Healthy Sleep Habits

“I can get it done, I’ll just stay up a little later tonight and maybe get up a little earlier.”

Have you ever caught yourself trying to fit in maybe a late night TV show, a few extra minutes of social networking, or even a late night with friends even if it effects your sleep? If so, you are like millions of Americans who suffer from a lack of healthy sleep habits. Sleep is one of the best medicines for our bodies because it effects our immune system, our mood and cognition, and can even effect our appetite.

Some people do not realize the effects of sleep deprivation can have because they think their body can adapt. Functionally, these people may seem alright but metabolically, weight and appetite, they are suffering.

If you suffer from unhealthy sleep habits, here are a few tips to incorporate and start getting the rest you need.

Maintain a regular sleep-wake cycle. This allows the body’s circadian rhythm to maintain a routine which allows falling asleep and waking to be easier.

Establish a calming pre-sleep routine. This should not involve watching TV because even calming shows can interfere with sleep. Try reading, knitting, or a crossword puzzle. Avoid alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine throughout the day, especially close to bedtime to prevent night-time awakenings.

Also, limit light exposure during the evening. Too much light at night can trick the body into thinking it is day time and causes difficulty falling asleep.

Make the bedroom a place of comfort. This is one of the most important healthy sleep habits and one of the simplest. Only go to sleep when you are tired. Doing other activities in the bedroom can again confuse the body and make it more difficult to get a fulfilling night’s rest.

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Healthy Sleep Tips

- Make the bedroom a comfortable sleep area
- Establish a calming pre-sleep routine
- Limit light exposure in the evening, especially TV
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine
- Maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule
- Eat dinner about 2-3 hours before bedtime
- Exercise regularly, not too close to bedtime
- Maintain a healthy diet

National Sleep Awareness Week 2013

Every year the National Sleep Foundation hosts a sleep awareness week campaign to celebrate the health benefits of sleep. This year March 3-10th has been designated as sleep awareness week. This week kicks off with the release of this year’s Sleep in America poll on Monday, March 4th. This poll looks at the relationship between exercise and sleep and should have some exciting information. The week ends with Daylight Savings Time when we all move an hour ahead and lose an extra hour of sleep. For more information about the campaign, visit: www.sleepfoundation.org
### How Much Sleep Do You Need?

Changes to sleep patterns are a part of the normal aging process. As we age, we have more difficulty falling asleep and more trouble staying asleep than the younger years. Many people believe that sleep needs decline with age; however, research shows that our sleep needs remain constant throughout adulthood.1

Experts have determined that healthy adults require 7.5 to 8.5 hours of sleep per 24 hour period.1 This can vary from person to person, but it is important to be aware of what your sleep needs are. A good way to determine this is to take a “sleep vacation.”

During a two-week period when you have flexibility with your sleep, perhaps vacation, pick a consistent bedtime. Go to sleep every night at this time and wake-up without an alarm clock. For the first few days you will probably sleep more than you need because you are paying off the sleep deprivation you have accumulated over time. If you continue to go to bed at the same time, you will eventually establish a sleep-wake pattern that allows you to determine how much sleep you need to feel rested and keep you healthy and alert. It is your responsibility then to make sleep a priority and be sure to get the amount you need each night.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hours of Sleep per 24 hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschoolers (3-5 years)</td>
<td>11—13 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>School aged children (5-12 years)</td>
<td>10—11 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents (12-18 years)</td>
<td>8.5—9.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (18 and above)</td>
<td>7.5—8.5 hours</td>
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</tbody>
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Adapted from: sleepfoundation.org

### What You Should Know About Insomnia

Insomnia is not a sleep disorder by itself, it is a symptom. Insomnia can be caused by depression, disease, pain, medications, stress or anxiety, poor nutrition, sleep disorders, or unhealthy sleep habits. It is defined as difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or having nonrestorative sleep and can cause daytime impairments. Insomnia generally occurs at least 3 times per week for at least one month.1

In America, 48% of people report insomnia occasionally and 22% experience it almost every night. Woman are 1.3 times more likely to have insomnia compared with men, and people over 65 are 1.5 times as likely to have insomnia compared to younger people. Insomnia can be chronic, lasting 3 weeks or more, or acute, lasting a few days to 2-3 weeks.1

Before a doctor can treat insomnia, it is important to understand its cause. Be sure to evaluate your sleep habits before seeking treatment. If insomnia persists despite behavior changes, seek advice from your doctor.

#### Being awake for 22 hours straight can slow your reaction time more than four alcoholic drinks.1

### Common Sleep Disorders

Approximately 70 million Americans suffer from over 80 different types of sleep disorders.3 Sleep disorders cause daytime sleepiness, depression, and problems with weight management. It is important to familiarize yourself with common sleep disorders to ensure you or your loved ones are not suffering.

Sleep apnea occurs when a person’s breathing is interrupted during sleep. When untreated, people can stop breathing up to hundreds of times during one night. The common two types are central and obstructive sleep apnea. Central is a problem with the brain, and obstructive is a blockage of the airway.3

Restless leg syndrome is characterized by tingling, creeping, or painful sensations in the legs that generally occurs in the evenings and makes sleeping difficult. The sensation is brought on by lying down or sitting for a long period and can be relieved by walking or shaking the legs.3

Narcolepsy is a disorder of the brain which causes uncontrollable sleep attacks. These attacks may occur during any type of activity. It typically begins between 15 and 25 years of age.3

If you believe you are suffering from any of these disorders, talk to your doctor as soon as possible.
When you do get to bed, make sure you are not watching the clock at night. This is a common mistake which can cause anxiety and restlessness. Set that alarm and start counting sheep!

It is possible to eliminate many minor sleep problems by maintaining a healthy balance of nutrition and exercise. Exercise regularly but not too close to bedtime. This allows the body to burn off energy throughout the day and be able to rest when bedtime rolls around. Studies have shown that a healthy diet leads to significantly less nighttime awakenings and an increase in deep sleep leading to feeling rested upon awakening. Studies have also shown that the part of the brain associated with appetite is much more active after a night without sleep than it is after a full night’s sleep.1 So by getting a good night’s rest you can also make it easier to maintain a healthy weight and stay on track with a healthy diet.

It is important to remember, even if life prevents you from achieving the perfect sleep routine, making just a few changes can improve your sleep dramatically.

References

