

MARCH IS NATIONAL SLEEP AWARENESS MONTH

March 2018



Adequate sleep is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. In order to have sufficient rest, the average adult needs approximately 8 hours of sleep a night. Teenagers need about 9 - 9 ½ hours and children 11 years old and younger - about 10 hours.

Functions of Sleep

During sleep, heart rate, body temperature and oxygen consumption decrease. Metabolism decreases as well, allowing body to go into “restoration mode.”

During a sleep state, the human brain eliminates waste products of metabolism at a much faster rate than while awake.

Glycogen concentration in the brain increases during sleep and is being used as a source of energy when one is awake. Adequate sleep also strengthens the immune system. Some studies suggest that sleep increases white cell count, which helps to fight infections. Sleep also facilitates memory retention by isolating the brain from outside stimuli.



Sleep Disorders

The most common sleep disorder is insomnia. Generally, insomnia is represented by difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep.

Insomnia can be caused by a multitude of reasons. This can include an inconsistent sleep schedule, stress, an uncomfortable sleep environment, physical or mental stimulation later in the day.

A condition called Obstructive Sleep Apnea causes sleep interruption. These apnea episodes are caused by the relaxing of muscles around the airways, which leads to pauses in breathing due to collapsed airways. When oxygen levels drop, the person has to come out of deeper stages of sleep in order to resume breathing. Because of multiple episodes of wakefulness, patients might feel tired despite sleeping several hours a night. This condition usually requires a professional study in order to be diagnosed.

Other disorders, not as common as listed above, include narcolepsy, restless leg syndrome (RLS), periodic limb movement disorder (PLMD), and some other rare genetic diseases.

Insufficient Sleep Consequences for Teenagers

Lack of sleep can cause a wide variety of physical, emotional, social and behavioral problems. Teenagers especially have a greater chance to experience memory troubles, difficulty learning and poor decision making.

They are at significant risk to get involved in unhealthy behaviors like smoking, drinking and drug use. Inadequate sleep also poses a serious danger when an inexperienced driver gets sleepy behind the wheel.

Risk of sports injuries and other accidents also increases.



What We Can Do to Make Sleep Better

- Keep temperature in your bedrooms cool. Cold environments decreases core body temperature making it easier to fall asleep.
- Do not exercise within 4 hours of sleep time - it keeps body temperature up interfering with the ability to relax.
- Keep bedrooms technology free. Light interferes with melatonin production and has a negative effect on sleep, as well as mental stimulation before bedtime. Using social media in general has been linked to sleep problems.
- No studying late at night! Some people think that cramming before a test is helpful in gaining knowledge, but it can bring more problems the next day, including reduced academic performance.
- Be a role model as a parent. Try to maintain healthy sleeping habits. Do not drive if you are drowsy.



Sleep Deprivation and Weight Gain



If you are tired there is more chance that you would be grabbing a cup of coffee, and possibly a donut, just to keep yourself awake. Sugar is a source of energy, therefore when we are tired we tend to eat more sweets. Some studies show slowing of metabolism in order for the body to maintain a certain level of energy - another reason for gaining weight.

References:

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 American Academy of Sleep Medicine (2018). Sleep Education. <http://www.sleepeducation.org>
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