



Mind: Sleep Better to Live Longer

Body: The Stages of Sleep

Spirit: Balance

Sleep Better to Live Longer



It has long been accepted that we need good nutrition and regular exercise to contribute toward our health and longevity. Did you know that quality sleep was just as important?

We always think about sleep as being restive – and this is true. However, there exists another side of sleep that reveals that there is a lot going on during this time!

The active restorative aspect of sleep assists our cells in our muscles, organs, cardiovascular system and brain to repair and renew. Our metabolism and hormones are also included in these processes, and it has even been suggested that quality sleep can also help to keep our weight in check.

Conversely, then, inadequate sleep has the opposite effect on our systems. Poor quality or insufficient sleep can increase the risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, depression and anxiety, obesity, and increased risk of falls, stroke and some cancers. Prolonged sleep deprivation can decrease immune function, memory, and cognitive acuity.

It is important to also recognize that while poor sleep can affect health outcomes, pre-existing conditions can in turn influence the length and quality of sleep.

Sleep Deprivation and Impairment

No one disputes that driving while under the influence of alcohol can be deadly. Sleep deprivation and driving can also pose a deadly mix. Our concentration, reaction times, and executive functioning are reduced by lack of sleep, with the potential for tragic results. The on-going loss of just one hour of sleep (6 hours rather than 7 or 8 hours of sleep) can increase your risk of having a car accident by 33%! Furthermore, it has been suggested that 9% of all motor vehicle accidents are attributed to drivers operating a vehicle with less than seven hours of sleep.

More is Not Always Better

It is clear that too little sleep can have devastating consequences. But what about too much sleep? A study involving 30,000 individuals revealed that sleeping for nine or more hours per night (as compared to seven or eight hours of sleep,) increased the incidence of stroke by 23%. Furthermore, those who slept over nine hours and ALSO napped for 90 minutes or more increased their stroke risk by 85%!

Too much sleep may indicate other underlying

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health problems, such as sleep apnea, higher body mass index (BMI), and some psychiatric disorders. It appears, then, from the studies, the ‘just right’ amount of sleep for most folks falls between seven and eight hours each day.

TIPS for a Better Sleep

- Establish a consistent bed-time and wake-up time. Keep this schedule on week-ends as well as weekdays.
- For those with changing shift work or changing wake times, if possible, start to change your bedtime and wake times in gradual increments.
- Prepare for a good sleep. About 30 minutes prior to your bedtime, start to wind down. Lower the lights, engage in ‘relaxing’ activities, and shut down electronics.
- Don’t eat just before bed.
- Avoid alcohol just before bed – it may help you fall asleep initially, but will contribute to waking up a short time later.
- Eliminate caffeine hours before bed.
- Sleep in a dark room, set to a comfortable temperature, and eliminate as much noise as possible.
- Eliminate ‘blue light’ from electronic devices.

Catch-Up?

Most people experience some form of sleep deprivation at various points in their lives. Work demands, all-nighter cramming for exams, shift work, jet lag, and parties can all disrupt our regular sleep patterns. Although it is best to avoid ‘sleep

debt,’ you may be able to recover and re-set. Many individuals look to week-end sleep-ins and naps to recover from a sleep debt. The jury is still out on whether this short-term solution is actually helpful. Sleep experts suggest instead, that a more effective approach is to incorporate the long-term tips identified above. Above all, give your new habits time to become routine.

Sources: SleepFoundation.org; verywellhealth.com

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The Stages of Sleep



The main stages of sleep include 3 progressive stages of non-Rapid Eye Movement (REM), and the final stage of REM. Some researches break it down further to 4 stages of non-REM, with the 5th stage of REM. During the non-REM stages, we fall progressively into deeper stages and levels of sleep, where our breathing rate, brainwave rate, and temperature gradually reduces. The deepest stage of non-REM sleep is believed to be the most restorative. We dream during the REM stage, and this stimulation helps our brain sort through and store information. We cycle through these stages a number of times throughout the night.

Balance

“There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither.”

Alan Cohen

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