

MAY: SLEEP – IT DOES A BODY GOOD!

The Sleep in America polls, conducted on behalf of the National Sleep Foundation, consistently show that only half of adults get a good night's sleep almost every night. Today, about one third of adults report getting less than seven hours of sleep on workdays.

Certainly, how we live is affecting how we sleep: "often, our poor sleep is related to too much caffeine, nicotine, alcohol. Often it's related to work – stress from work, putting in long hours at work, working night shifts, working on the home computer until seconds before we go to bed" says Dr. M. Kryger, a sleep disorders center director.

There's strong evidence that lost sleep is a very serious matter – large studies have linked sleep deficits with poor work performance, driving accidents, relationship problems, and mood problems like anger and depression. A growing number of health risks has been documented in recent studies, too: heart disease, diabetes, and obesity have all been linked with chronic sleep loss.

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP

Over the past decade, researchers have learned much about sleep: there are nearly 100 identified sleep/wake disorders, including **hypersomnia** (sleep deprivation, or excessive daytime sleepiness which impairs attention with occasionally disastrous consequences in the classroom, workplace or on the highways) and **insomnia** (trouble falling or staying asleep). Possibly a contributing factor for depression, neurologic scans show differences between the brains of insomniacs and non-insomniacs: there may be a genetic component, and typically have a family history of insomnia, notes Dr. Mark Mahowald, a neurologist and director of the Sleep Disorders Center in Rochester, Minnesota.

There are numerous other symptoms of disturbed sleep – nightmares or night terrors, sleep-walking, bedwetting, etc. All of these impact our lives – employers suffer when an employee's work performance is affected by poor or inadequate sleep; when children or elderly family members suffer sleep disorders, parents or caregivers also suffer. Sleep deprivation has been directly linked to prediabetes, a condition seen in a growing number of Americans: people who sleep less than six hours per night are more likely to develop impaired fasting glucose (based on a six-year study reported to the American Heart Association's Annual Conference on Cardiovascular Disease Epidemiology and Prevention in 2009). No association was found in people who slept more than eight hours each night.

Chronic sleep deprivation is also seen in a growing number of school-aged children, as are increased numbers of children with diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

TIPS FOR IMPROVED SLEEP...

It is important to make a commitment to healthy sleep in order to feel restored and refreshed... Here are some tips from the Better Sleep Council (yes! – there is such an organization!) for maintaining a healthy sleep cycle and ensuring the best possible night's rest:

- Make sleep a priority by keeping a consistent sleep and wake schedule, including weekends
- Create a bedtime routine that is relaxing – experts recommend reading a book, listening to soothing music or soaking in a hot bath just before sleep. This helps to break the connection between the stress of the day and your bedtime.



"Sleepin' like a baby..."

- Transform your bedroom into a haven of comfort – create a room that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool for the best possible sleep
- Evaluate your mattress and pillow to ensure proper comfort and support: sleeping with a lumpy pillow on a sagging mattress can hardly be restful!
- Keep work materials, computers and televisions out of the bedroom!
- Exercise regularly, but complete workouts at least two hours before bedtime so that your body has time to cool down and relax
- Avoid stimulants like nicotine and caffeine – used close to bedtime, they can keep you awake; although alcohol is considered a depressant and may help you to fall asleep, the process of metabolizing alcohol produces a mild withdrawal syndrome that disturbs sleep, and may even cause nightmares.
- Finish eating at least two (better, three!) hours before bedtime – while a light snack may actually improve your rest, a heavy (especially greasy) meal will disturb sleep... instead, have a small portion of tryptophan-rich foods, such as warm milk, poultry, banana or oats and honey.
- If you sleep with a partner, be sure that your bed offers adequate space and support for each of you to move easily, without waking the other... sleeping with your pet may also disturb your rest, due to allergies and their movement... better to keep Fido and Kitty on the floor than on your sheets!

Sleep hygiene – those practices, habits and environmental factors that are critical for sound sleep – are largely within our control... make the most of your rest, and you'll wake refreshed! For more information, go to

www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/sleep-hygiene
www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/slideshow-sleep-foods
www.bettersleep.org/sleep-physical-performance.asp
<http://children.webmd.com/features/sleep-it-does-a-body-good>
www.sleepapnea.org/index.html

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