

## Why rest is important for your health



Monthly Health Challenge™

# Get Adequate Sleep and Rest

**CHALLENGE**  
Get 7 to 8 hours sleep daily.

- On the calendar link sent by email, record the number of hours of sleep that you get each day.
- Read "Why rest is important for your health" on this page.
- To complete the Challenge; get 7 hours of sleep on at least 23 days in October.
- Recording your 7 hours of daily sleep 23 times out of the month will put your name in the challenge prize drawing.

During the day the body's metabolism is in a state of actively coping with the many demands made upon it that often results in physical, mental, and emotional strain. This state is called catabolism. The body is breaking down stored energy and reserves to meet demands. At night when the body is resting, another form of metabolism takes place called anabolism. This involves repairing damaged tissues, strengthening the body, and building up health and energy reserves. Some of this restoring occurs during the day as well, but some repair and tissue building only occurs during sleep.

You can easily see that if sleep is inadequate, the body doesn't have the time it needs for repair and building back health reserves. Eventually the body becomes exhausted, fatigue sets in, and health and quality of life are seriously impaired.

### People who suffer from fatigue find...

- Their memory is impaired
- They are more easily upset and frustrated
- They are more difficult to get along with than when rested
- They have less initiative, are less efficient, and productivity suffers
- They are less alert, judgment is impaired, and more accidents occur (fatigue contributes to over 100,000 auto crashes yearly)
- Their immune system is depressed and they are more likely to catch a cold, the flu, or other infection
- They are more likely to be depressed or unhappy with life

It's not a very pleasant list is it? Getting adequate rest each day is vital for physical and mental health. To feel your best, plan to get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep daily! You will most likely live longer as well.

### What is adequate rest?

Two large studies have looked at hours of sleep and health status. Both found that at least 7 hours per night of uninterrupted rest is the minimum needed for most people for good health. The first study (Cancer Prevention 2) included over 1 million people.<sup>1</sup> Best survival rates were found among those who got at least 7 hours of sleep per night. If people got less than this, mortality rates began to rise. Growing evidence shows that chronic lack of sleep increases the risk for developing obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, infections, cognitive difficulties, and mood problems. Yet today, an estimated 70 million people (about 30% of adults in the U.S.) are not getting enough rest to feel and perform their best.

The Good Health Practices study found similar results. Those who got 7 to 8 hours sleep per night lived significantly longer than those who got less. This gives a good clue to how much sleep we need. Sleep requirements seem to vary somewhat among people, but everyone should wake up fresh and feel rested during the day, not tired. Children need 9 to 10 hours and teens need 8 to 9 hours because their body and brain are still growing. Some adults also seem to feel and function best if they regularly get 8 to 9 hours. If you need more than that, you may have a health problem. Ask your doctor for help.

## Insomnia - improving sleep habits

Some people have difficulty sleeping. Worry and anxiety are often to blame. Don't add worrying about not sleeping to your other problems. It won't help. It is interesting to note that in the sleep study involving 1 million people,<sup>1</sup> those who complained of insomnia did not have any increased risk of mortality, but people who often took sleeping pills did. If you are bothered by insomnia, keep a diary of your sleep patterns and discuss it with your doctor.

Here are some suggestions to improve your ability to enjoy regular sleep habits.

- **Be physically active daily.** Exercise helps reduce stress and feelings of anxiety and helps you relax. People who exercise regularly fall to sleep faster and get more sleep than those who don't exercise. Get your exercise earlier than just before bedtime. Exercising 6 hours or less before bedtime makes you feel wide awake, not sleepy.
- **Be regular in your sleep habits.** The more closely you follow a consistent schedule, the better your sleep habits will be.
- **Your sleeping area should be quiet,** dark, comfortable, and cool. A TV or computer in your room can be a distraction. So can an uncomfortable mattress or pillow.
- **Develop a routine that works for you.** Do something just before you go to sleep each night that helps you relax and prepare for sleep. It may be a warm bath, reading a book, or listening to relaxing music. Enjoy the relaxing time and then fall off to sleep.
- **Avoid drinking coffee** or other caffeinated beverages several hours (6 to 8 hours) before bedtime. Smoking is also a stimulant. Avoid smoking before going to bed.
- **Avoid drinking alcohol.** While it may make you feel drowsy, it has a tendency to wake you up and can lead to a night of less sleep.
- **Avoid late meals.** Most people don't sleep well with a full stomach.
- **Don't watch exciting movies** just before you try to go to sleep.
- **Don't stay in bed too long if awake.** If you can't fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes after turning out the lights, it's best to get up out of bed and do another relaxing activity such as

reading until you feel sleepy. Just don't choose exciting stories that you can't put down.

- **Consider a midday nap.** Naps can't substitute for a good night's sleep, but if a short nap (one hour or less) midday refreshes you and makes you more alert, add it to your daily routine. It's generally best not to take long naps or nap close to bedtime, as it will disturb your sleep at night.
- **Avoid late hours.** Some sleep experts feel that the sleep you get before midnight may be your best sleep. Keeping late hours is generally not a good health habit.
- **Expose yourself to sunlight.** Try to get outside in natural sunlight 30 minutes each day. If you have problems falling asleep, get an hour of exposure to morning sunlight.
- **Avoid medicines that disrupt sleep.** such as certain pain relievers, steroids, heart, blood pressure, and asthma medications, and over-the-counter or herbal remedies for coughs, colds, or allergies.

## Snoring and sleep apnea

An estimated 12 to 18 million American adults have sleep apnea. In sleep apnea, breathing is interrupted during sleep. Each interruption may last 10 seconds or more and the pattern can occur 20 or 30 times each hour. These breathing pauses are almost always accompanied by loud snoring. Restful sleep is nearly impossible under this condition.

Airways can be obstructed in your throat, soft palate, or by your tongue. Sleep apnea can be a health-threatening. A study involving more than 6,000 adults, ages 40 and over, showed that the risk of hypertension increased with the severity of sleep apnea in all participants, regardless of age, sex, race, or weight. The risk was seen even at moderate levels of sleep apnea.

If you don't wake up in the morning rested, you fall asleep during normal daily activities, or your sleep is interrupted by loud snoring or interrupted breathing, ask your health care provider about a sleep apnea test. The most common treatment is continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), a procedure involving use of a facemask which forces air through the nasal passages. Behavioral changes, especially weight loss, are usually recommended as well.

### Mild snoring

If you snore occasionally, if your snoring annoys your partner, or if you want to reduce your snoring, try:

- Sleeping on your side instead of your back
- Avoiding alcohol before going to bed
- Avoiding sleeping pills, tranquilizers, or antihistamines before bedtime
- Avoiding smoking or using other tobacco products
- Losing weight, if overweight
- Sleeping with your head slightly higher than the rest of the body

If these home remedies don't work, a medical specialist, called an otolaryngologist, can specifically provide a professional examination and diagnosis, and help determine a course of treatment.

### References:

- *Mortality associated with sleep duration*. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 59:137-8. February 2002.
- *National Sleep Foundation*. [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org). 2006
- *Snoring: Not Funny, Not Hopeless*. *American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery*. 2002. \_\_\_\_\_

- *Study Shows Association Between Sleep Apnea and Hypertension. Press Release. National Institutes of Health. April 11, 2000.*
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