

The Sleep Battle No Snooze? – You Lose!

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We spend almost a third of our lives sleeping, but the amount of sleep a person needs differs from person-to-person, and it changes as we go through various stages of life. Young children sleep from 10-15 hours per day, and as they mature, they need less sleep. Young adults need 8-9 hours per night to function properly in school and to develop fully. Adults that sleep between 6.5 hours -7.5 hours a night tend to live the longest, and get the best quality of sleep.

Trouble sleeping is associated with a whole host of illnesses including hypertension (high blood pressure), heart attacks, strokes (brain attacks), overall pain, obesity, diabetes and depression

QUALITY OF SLEEP

Our quality of sleep, i.e., how rested and alert we feel the next day, is more important than how many hours we sleep. Poor quality sleep results in moodiness, difficulty in dealing with stress, irritability, frustration, decreased cognitive function, confused thinking, and memory issues. Sleep deprived individuals also have higher accident and injury rates than those that get restful sleep.

SLEEP/WAKE CYCLE

Falling asleep and staying asleep are two aspects of the sleep/wake cycle. Insomnia, Latin for "no sleep," is trouble falling asleep, or middle-of-the-night waking, followed by difficulty in returning to sleep. Thirty to forty percent of adults have insomnia, and 10-15% of people report that they have problems sleeping.

SLEEP AFFECTS IMMUNE AND HORMONE FUNCTION

Inflammatory immune factors, growth hormones, liver enzymes, and other biochemical molecules are released into the bloodstream during deep sleep. Sleep deprivation results in excessive levels of inflammation, and makes it more difficult for the immune system to protect the body against infection and heal. One "extra" night of sleep is not enough to help the immune system return to its optimum levels.

In athletes, sleep deprivation blunts the effect of immune factors and growth hormones, limiting their recovery, muscle growth, and performance. In developing children, lack of sleep causes behavioral issues and may slow their growth.

WAKING TOO FREQUENTLY

Over the age of fifty, many men find they wake up frequently to urinate, and feel tired in the morning. Two primary reasons for getting up during the night to urinate, are an enlarged prostate, and sleep apnea.

The prostate is a small reproductive gland that secretes fluid that carries and nourishes the sperm. The prostate may swell in response to growth factors and immune/inflammatory molecules produced by the body, especially as men age. The enlarging prostate presses on the bladder, resulting in more frequent urination. This becomes especially troublesome during their sleeping hours.

Sleep apnea is associated with overweight individuals. Individuals with sleep apnea may stop breathing 5 - 30 times or more an hour. The condition results in daytime sleepiness and frequent napping. Individuals suffering from sleep apnea have higher levels of inflammation than those without this sleep disorder.

TIPS FOR BETTER QUALITY SLEEP

Temperature, Noise, Light

Think of the bedroom as your sleeping cave. Ideally, it should be cool, quiet, and dark. Try to set the temperature at a level that is comfortable for you. A mild drop in body temperature helps to induce sleep, so a cooler room is best.

Noise contributes to sleep disruption.

Figure out what works for you. Some people find a ticking clock soothing; for others it keeps them awake. If the snoring of your partner keeps you from getting sleep, then direct your efforts to helping them decrease their snoring, or sleep in a separate room.

Limit your exposure to light stimuli to fall asleep more rapidly and stay asleep.

Light disturbs the sleep/waking cycle so use shades to cut out light. Turn the lighted front of a radio or clock so you cannot see it. Use a dim night light to find the bathroom rather than turning on a bright light.

Stick to a Sleep Schedule

To sleep well, go to bed and get up the same time each day, even on weekends. Altering the sleep schedule by an hour or so, may be enough to confuse your daily sleep/waking cycle.

If you need a nap, set the alarm and take a 17-30 minute snooze. More than a short nap will make you feel groggy and feel unrested.

Regular Physical Activity, Sleep, and Stress

Regular physical activity helps people fall asleep faster, and sleep more deeply. Every time we contract our muscles, we release anti-inflammatory molecules associated with quality sleep. Stress due to family financial, or work issues, is

a major cause of disturbed and reduced sleep. Physical activity helps the body reduce inflammation-associated stress.

Limit Caffeine, Alcohol, and Smoking

Caffeine can stimulate some people for 10-12 hours after consumption. To sleep more soundly, limit your intake of energy drinks, colas, coffee, and tea.

Many people think alcohol relaxes them and helps them fall asleep. The problem is that once the affect of alcohol wears off, sleep is disrupted, and they are unable to fall back asleep again. Women are especially sensitive to alcohol. Women who drink alcohol close to bedtime, wake up frequent, and take longer and longer to fall back asleep again. Their sleep is significantly interrupted.

Nicotine stimulates smokers, and every evening when they sleep, they go through withdrawal, which may wake them. Some smokers will even wake up to have a cigarette! Cigarette smokers spend less time in deep sleep than non-smokers, and are four times as likely as non-smokers to report that they were "not well-rested" when they awaken in the morning.

TO SLEEP – REDUCE INFLAMMATION

Some animals never really "sleep"; instead, they appear to suspend daily activities and rest. However, humans need to sleep so that the body and mind can rebuild its energy reserves, brain and immune function and repair and grow muscles and other tissues. Using techniques that lower immune inflammation will help achieve a higher level of quality sleep.

For more information on inflammation, visit: DrHellenGreenblatt.info