

May 2018 Issue

## Want to Be Healthier? Don't Skimp on Sleep

The older we get, the busier our lives seem to become. Work, after-work activities, homework, housework, and the enticement of binge-watching TV shows gradually reduce those hours when we should be sleeping. It may not seem like a big deal, but missing out on the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep nightly does more than simply make you sluggish and crabby.

**There are many potentially detrimental and long-term effects of sleep deprivation:**



- Reduced concentration and ability to remember things
- Negative affect on mood and emotional stability that can lead to anxiety and depression
- Increased possibility of being involved in an accident
- Compromised or weakened immune system
- Greater likelihood of developing high blood pressure and/or diabetes
- Escalated risk for heart disease
- Weight gain due to reduction in the hormones that help signal when you're full and an increase in hormones that stimulate appetite
- Decreased coordination and balance

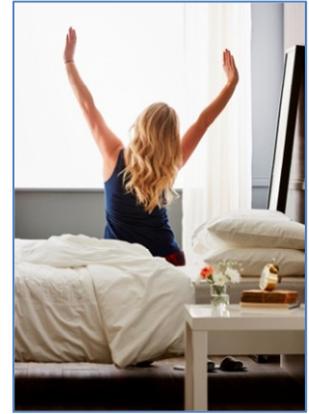
There's no way around it; your body and mind require sleep. Think of it as the time that your body needs to heal itself and to restore your chemical balance. During sleep, your brain forms new connections that assist with memory retention. Your body simply cannot function the way it is designed to perform when you routinely skimp on getting the adequate amount of sleep, which can decrease your overall quality of life.

While a general goal should be to strive for eight hours of sleep nightly, children and teenagers need even more to support healthy growth. If you generally wake up feeling tired and spending the day longing for a chance to take a nap, chances are that you are not getting enough sleep.

# Tips for a More Restful Night's Sleep

Try these simple changes to help improve your quality of sleep:

- Try to fall asleep and wake up at about the same times each day. This allows for your body to begin regulating its natural rhythms.
- Develop a nighttime routine. Much like it does for children, a routine helps our brain to recognize that it will soon be time to sleep.
  - An example of a nighttime routine may be to take a walk after dinner, wash up and get your night clothes on, have a cup of tea or something else non-caffeinated, and read for a while until you are ready to lie down in bed.
- Limit electronics in the evening. Turn off tablets, phones and any other electronic device an hour before bed. The screen light can interfere with your brain's ability to recognize signs for sleep.
- Practice relaxation. This could include meditation, stretching, journaling, or listening to soft music. Relaxation can lower blood pressure and heart rate, decrease muscle tension, and slow breathing, which are all good for your health.
- Limit or eliminate caffeine, alcohol, and heavy foods, which can all disrupt or prevent you from having a sound sleep.
- Keep your bedroom clean, free of clutter, and dark. Try using your bedroom only for sleeping. Save other activities, such as watching TV or reading, for another room.



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## Understanding Common Causes of Temporary Insomnia

Most people experience short-term insomnia at some time in their lives. Insomnia includes experiencing trouble falling asleep, having trouble getting back to sleep, and waking up too early. Insomnia is more common in females, people with a history of depression, and those older than 60.



**Several things can contribute to temporary insomnia:**

- Hearing noises
- Stressful events like the loss of a job or a death in the family or even catastrophic world events
- Certain medications, particularly those that treat colds and allergies, heart disease, high blood pressure, and pain
- Bad habits that sabotage our sleep including drinking alcohol and eating too close to bedtime

Short-term insomnia lasts only a few days and is usually not a cause for concern. For example, with jet lag or even seasonal time changes, your internal body clock will readjust itself within several days. Insomnia is considered chronic when it lasts most nights for a few weeks or more. This longer-term condition deserves professional attention. If you are unsure whether you have chronic insomnia, experts suggest looking at it like you would a headache. If it goes on day after day, and nothing you do seems to help, you should see a health care professional, particularly if you cannot find a cause.

Sometimes insomnia is caused by an underlying illness that needs treatment, such as:

- Thyroid disorders
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Restless leg syndrome