

Get a Better Night's Sleep

Did you know we spend one-third of life sleeping? Sleep is a major contributing factor to our overall health. Quality of sleep is equally as important as the quantity.

Without sleep, our bodies cannot develop or continue the pathways in our brain that initiate learning and the ability to create new memories. Lack of sleep leads to the inability to concentrate and have quick responses. Sleep is vital to the rest of the body, too. When we lack sleep, our health risks rise.

Without appropriate sleep, our body's immunity is compromised, which can lead to an increase in illness and infection. Symptoms of depression, migraines, seizures, and high blood pressure may worsen without adequate sleep. Sleep also plays an important role in maintaining healthy blood sugar levels. Lack of sleep has been associated with diabetes. Just one night of missed sleep can increase insulin resistance, which in turn can increase blood sugar levels.

Recommended sleep times vary among age groups. For adults (age 18 and older), the average recommended sleep time is 7-9 hours. However, you may obtain the proper quantity of sleep but still recognize signs of poor-quality sleep. If you are not feeling rested after the recommended amount of sleep, waking up multiple times during the night, or experiencing signs of sleep disorders (e.g., snoring or gasping for air), talk to your healthcare provider about your symptoms to ensure a path for better quality of sleep and overall health.

For most people, the key to getting a good night's rest is practicing good sleeping habits—also known as *sleep hygiene*. The following tips are habits you can adopt to work toward a better night's sleep:

- Keep a sleep schedule. Attempt to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every day, including weekends.
- Create a relaxing, dark, and quiet atmosphere in your bedroom. Make sure the temperature is comfortable.
- Remove TV, computers, smart phones, and other electronic devices from your sleep space.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and large meals before bedtime
- Stay physically active throughout the day.

If sleep problems continue to occur or interfere with your daily function, talk to your healthcare provider. Before your visit, keep a sleep habit diary for 10 days. Include amount of caffeinated and alcoholic beverages, amount of exercise, and number of naps throughout the day. Write down the times you go to bed, fall asleep, wake up, and get out of bed.

Sources: NIH (ninds.nih.gov), Mayo Clinic (mayoclinic.org), CDC (cdc.gov)

