



QUICK FACTS ABOUT SLEEP



Why do we need sleep?

We spend a third of our lifetime asleep. No wonder it serves critical functions! Sleep is essential for several bodily functions. For instance, healthy sleep increases our ability to fight infections. Sleep also helps us restore energy and feel replenished.

Most importantly, sleep is *for* the brain: it improves cognitive function. What we have learned from more than two decades of research is that sleep is essential for attention, memory and emotional regulation.

Sleep & Teens

Our bodies (including our brains!) undergo tremendous shifts during adolescence. During this time, our cognitive functioning becomes increasingly sophisticated and our emotion regulation skills improve. This is also a time of significant life changes for adolescents: they make take on additional responsibilities such as part-time jobs or extracurricular activities while their need for autonomy, to connect with friends, and academic pressures all increase. There are also several biological factors at play. These include a sleep phase-delay and alterations to the body's internal clock, and later release of the sleep-regulating hormone melatonin in the evening. All of these factors push teens to want to stay up later. Insufficient sleep in adolescence may lead to several negative outcomes such as excessive sleepiness, mood disturbances, poor grades, behavior problems, substance use, driving accidents or weight gain.

Sleep & Mental Health

On average, adults need 7-8 hours of sleep whereas adolescents need 9-10 hours every night. Recent surveys conducted by the Sleep Research Society show that many of us don't get the amount of sleep we need.

Poor sleep negatively impacts both our physical and emotional well-being. Several researchers, including those at the University of Iowa, study the relationship between sleep disturbance and mental illness. While it is no secret that most disorders such as depression, anxiety, bipolar illness or schizophrenia are accompanied by changes in sleep, recent work demonstrates that sleep disturbances may play a causal role in the emergence of these disorders.



SOME MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SLEEP

WRONG: We need less sleep as we age.

- We need sleep throughout development and older age. However, sleep becomes more fragmented with aging, and it becomes harder to fall asleep and maintain sleep.

WRONG: Occasional sleep deprivation is not a problem.

- Even a single night of sleep deprivation can impair learning and memory, make us irritable and impair our metabolic functions. So, please, please think twice if you were planning to pull an all-nighter for an exam!

WRONG: Medications are the only effective treatment for insomnia.

- Sleep medicines are intended only for short-term use. It is not possible to get a very healthy and restful sleep with medications. Behavioral interventions and therapy, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) are proven to be as effective as medications.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

There are several small steps you can take that will make a huge difference for your sleep health. Not all of them will work for everyone, so try things out to see what works best for you.

- Keep a routine of going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time every day. This includes the weekends.
- Try to avoid cigarettes and alcohol altogether. Coffee and other caffeinated beverages (black/green tea, cola, energy drinks, Mountain Dew, etc.) should not be consumed in the evenings.
- Maximize natural light exposure during the day by spending time outside. For instance, you could try eating your lunch outdoors and take daily walks. You should also keep the curtains or blinds open, letting in as much daylight as possible
- Reduce artificial light in the evening by cutting back on computer and TV time.
- Try to avoid daytime naps, as this will make it harder to sleep at night.
- Try to be active as much as possible during the day – BUT avoid any strenuous exercise within 3 hours of bedtime. Working out before going to bed makes it harder to fall asleep and interferes with sleep quality.
- Make sure your bedroom is a good sleep environment – it should be comfortable, cool, quiet, and dark.
- Do not use your bed for anything other than sleep and intimacy. Avoid eating or drinking or watching movies in bed.