

## Health

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### Guide to a good night's sleep

Sleep deprivation is a common condition that afflicts millions of American adults and the problem appears to be getting worse. According to the National Sleep Foundation, the average person in 1910 slept 9 hours a night. By 1975, the total had fallen to 7.5 hours. By the year 2002, the NSF's "Sleep in America" poll had indicated that the average American adult slept only 6.9 hours a night, with shift workers often averaging only five hours a night.

Exhaustion, fatigue and lack of physical energy are common sleep deprivation symptoms. These affect our emotional moods, causing pessimism, sadness, stress and anger. The NSF has even suggested that social problems such as road rage may be caused, in part, by a national epidemic of sleepiness. Insufficient rest adversely affects the brain's ability to control speech, access memory and solve problems. Sleep deprived individuals who are normally healthy quickly show symptoms of age and early diabetes as glucose metabolism falls by up to 40 percent. These physical reactions disappear when the person is allowed to rest properly. Finally, the federal government's National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that the risk of being obese goes up as the number of hours of sleep at night goes down: 6 hours of sleep, 23 percent risk; 5 hours of sleep, 50 percent risk; 4 hours of sleep, 73 percent risk.

There are many causes of sleep deprivation. Emotional stress, travel, excitement, some physical and mental conditions and some medications (especially a large number of over-the-counter drugs) can interfere with sleeping patterns. Any medical condition that causes chronic pain can disturb a person's natural rest pattern. Food additives, caffeine, alcohol and nicotine can also make falling asleep hard. Conditions such as depression, a fight with a spouse, worry about an upcoming deadline, anger and grief can all prevent a restful night.

How much sleep should you get? Different people require different amounts of rest. The majority of adults should spend between 8 to 9 hours asleep, but some people function perfectly well on less (as little as 5) and others need more (at least 10 hours a night). We also need less sleep as we get older - young children need up to 11 or 13 hours of sleep, while people over 65 need only 6-8 hours. How much a person requires is dependent on their circadian rhythm, or internal clock.

There are many things that you can do to get a good night's sleep. Some ideas include the following:

1. Use the bed only for sleep or sex.
2. Wake up and go to bed at the same time each day, even on the weekends to help your body get into a sleep rhythm.
3. Get 30 minutes of exercise at least three days a week, but don't exercise close to bedtime.
4. Listen to white noise or relaxation CD's.
5. Eat a high-protein snack several hours before bed with a small piece of fruit.
6. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and sugar within three hours of bedtime.
7. Lose weight to reduce the risk of sleep apnea.
8. Don't drink any fluids within 2 hours of going to bed.
9. Don't smoke - it affects your sleeping patterns.
10. Sleep in complete darkness, or as close as possible to darkness.
11. Keep your sleeping area cool.