

What Are The Benefits Of Sleep?

Without a doubt the most obvious answer is that sleep rests and restores the human body. Early this century researchers decided to find out what body chemicals were affected by the lack of sleep. They found that when they took spinal fluid from dogs deprived of sleep and then injected it into other canines alert and awake, they became sleepy. In more recent studies it seems that cats lacking regular sleep have less protein available for their body needs. Currently, scientists have found that during the period of deep sleep, growth hormone is released, which has been found to enhance bone synthesis as well as being linked to the formation of red blood cells.

The most important benefit of a good night's rest is mental restoration. Without restful sleep our minds seem to suffer much more than our bodies. An average individual who stays awake for 24 hours will have difficulty in performing simple routine tasks. After two days that same person will have noticeable mood shifts, blurred vision and headaches.

What About Those Dreams?

Ten years ago a 33-year-old Israeli lawyer made medical history as the first recorded case of a dreamless sleeper. As a result of an army wound, scientists have been able to pinpoint what they believe is the dream center of the brain. Since the lawyer apparently leads a normal, active lifestyle, this new evidence has fueled the debate over whether other psychological functions are performed by dreaming.

What might be even more surprising is how different cultures are affected by dreams. In a questionnaire concerning dreams given to 271 Chinese and 340 American college students, only 13% of those from China believed that dreams are good for your health as compared to 81% of those from the United States. Another significant difference was that 74% of the American students believed they dreamed in color, whereas only 28% of the Chinese thought they did. But in both cultures most dreams were about the people they loved.

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Produced by: North American Division Health Ministries. *Director:* DeWitt Williams
Coordinator—Editor: Gordon Botting. *Design—Assistant Editor:* Ed Fergusson



Looking for a Slumber Solution

By Gordon Botting

Would you like to live a long and healthy life? One of the best ways to increase the odds in your favor scientists tell us is by getting an average of seven to eight hours of sleep every night. If you only rest six hours or less, you stand a seventy percent chance of dying before your time. Fortunately, the sleep mechanisms in your brain tend to put you to sleep when you have gone too long without adequate rest.

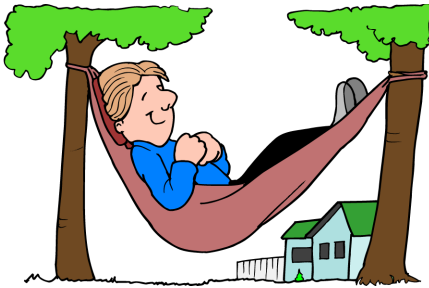
However, it has become a challenge in our hectic age to get enough zzz's. A recent poll by U. S. News and CNN indicates that only 28% of American adults get eight hours of sleep. Just over half of those surveyed said that they were satisfied with the sleep they were getting. It seems we are a nation of troubled sleepers. Annually, 10 million individuals seek medical help for a variety of sleep disorders, and one out of three Americans suffers from periodic sleeplessness or insomnia. At the same time, approximately 20% of the population worry about not getting a good night's rest. Researchers believe that the lack of sleep may have contributed to the Three Mile Island disaster and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. In one poll they found that 14% of full-time employees have rotating shifts that disrupt their biological clocks. Drowsy drivers account for as many as 10,000 traffic fatalities per year.

As you face the increased activity associated with our ever-busier lives, why not take a few minutes to stop and reflect on your need for both physical and spiritual rest.



Six Secrets for a Good Night's Rest

It is common for the majority of people to have trouble falling asleep or sleeping through the night sometime during their lifetime. To help you through those sleepless periods, you will find listed below six tips on how to get a good night's rest and wake up the next morning feeling refreshed.



Get a great bed

The average individual who lives to be seventy years old will spend approximately 23 years in the bedroom resting. If you are going to spend the next 23 years in bed, it makes sense to purchase a comfortable bed. It doesn't matter if it is a hammock,

a waterbed, a spring or one of those modern airflow mattresses, the important thing is that it gives you and your partner a well deserved night's rest.

Limit bedroom activities

Unfortunately, too many married couples have turned their bedrooms into work areas. On one side of the bedroom the husband has a desk piled high with bills that need attention and on the other side of the room the wife has piles of clothes that need folding or ironing. What a way to fall asleep! Imagine that the first thing that meets their eyes in the morning and the last thing they think about in the evening is that bill to be paid or those clothes that are needed by the children the next day. For married couples the bedroom should be strictly for rest and romance.

Watch what you drink

Caffeine is a well-known cause of sleeplessness. According to recent research, the caffeine consumed from only three cups of coffee can still have stimulating effects up to eight hours later. Remember other caffeinated substances such as cola, cocoa, chocolate and tea can result in poor-quality rest. Having "a little toddy" of alcohol, as the British say, does help you fall asleep. Unfortunately, as the human body metabolizes the alcohol it releases a stimulant that disrupts sleep during the second

half of the night. Having a glass of water before bedtime may result in a visit to the bathroom in the middle of the night, but consuming eight glasses of water on a daily basis will reduce nocturnal demands on your digestive system and certainly help eliminate toxins from your body.

Establish a regular sleeping schedule

Benjamin Franklin is often quoted for saying, "Early to bed and early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy and wise." Maybe you will never be wise or wealthy by being an early riser; but if you stay with a regular schedule for retiring to bed, you have an excellent chance of being healthy. Getting up and going to bed at the same time every day, including weekends, is one of the best steps toward establishing a regular sleep pattern. The only exception is, don't go to bed until you feel sleepy.

A diet for insomniacs

Many people think a bedtime snack will help them sleep better. Even though the much-touted glass of warm milk has the amino acid L-tryptophan as a natural sleep sedative, the fat content of the same dairy product will keep your digestive system working up to five hours after you have fallen asleep. Consequently, that is why after sleeping for eight hours you really only have had three hours of rest. Other dietary suggestions include eating plenty of calcium rich foods such as broccoli, cauliflower and soybeans. Cutting back on both sugar and salt also improves your slumber.

Exercise regularly

Can exercise help you sleep better? According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, 1997 researchers followed a group of forty-three sedentary men and women, all over the age of fifty, who had problems with sleeplessness. Half of the participants were assigned to a one-hour, low-impact aerobic class at a local YMCA twice a week. After four months the exercisers fell asleep within 15 minutes compared to their usual 30 minutes, and they slept nearly one hour longer than they did before.

