



Getting good night's sleep can ease health ailments

Eight hours of sleep a night may seem to be more of a luxury than a necessity, however, many researchers are finding that good sleep habits are as important to health as balanced nutrition and regular exercise. Even conditions such as obesity and diabetes appear to be more common in people who get less sleep. The possibility that a lack of sleep contributes to the development of these health problems is currently a hot area of research.

QUESTION: How does inadequate sleep affect the body?

ANSWER: The balance and function of several hormones are affected in ways that can stimulate appetite, trigger cravings and affect the regulation of blood sugar in the body. This is likely how being short on sleep may lead to weight gain and diabetes.

Q: How much sleep is typically recommended?

A: The National Sleep Foundation recommends eight hours of sleep per night. Although eight hours of sleep is an average recommendation, the ideal can vary from one person to another. Some people have no symptoms of sleep deprivation with only six hours of sleep a night, while others may need nine or even 10

hours to be at their best.

For children, it is consistently reported that those who get the most sleep are the least likely to become obese. Developing good sleeping habits early in life and getting plenty of good sleep may be especially important to lifelong health.

If you think you may not be getting enough sleep, here are some tips to help you improve your sleep habits. The following points are paraphrased from an article by Jean Gutierrez and Darryn Willoughby in the March/April issue of the journal *Nutrition Today*. You will likely find that some of these tips don't apply to you, while others could be your key to sound sleep.

» Stick to a consistent bedtime. This helps to keep the release of sleep-related hormones timed right.

» Don't consume caffeine late in the day. It takes about six hours for a healthy body to clear out a significant portion of the caffeine, so that afternoon coffee or cola can prevent some people from falling asleep.

» Avoid alcohol before bed. You may fall asleep quicker after consuming alcohol, but it can disrupt the normal progression of sleep stages and you may find yourself awake in the middle of the night.

» Keep all lights out. Even very small amounts of light can adversely affect the sleep of some people.

» Urinate right before bed so you are less likely to awake with your bladder requesting a bathroom visit.

» Turn the television off. Both the light emitted from the television and the mental stimulation can make it more difficult for some people to fall asleep.

» Stay off the cell phone before bed. Some, but not all, studies report that cell-phone radiation may reduce production of the sleep hormone melatonin. This one is debatable.

» Exercise. Consistent daily exercise of at least 30 minutes duration can help most people fall asleep more easily. However, exercise within an hour or two of bedtime may make it more difficult to fall asleep.

» Cool off. If you are too hot, you may find it to be more difficult to fall asleep. On hot nights, a light fan may be what you need to sleep more soundly.

» Focus on sleep. It may help to not use the bedroom for tasks such as study, work, or television watching. That way, when you go into the bedroom, the mind automatically considers it to be time to sleep.

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