



connect

wellbeing, ability, recovery

THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

A Good Night's Sleep

The cognitive and interpersonal skills we depend on in our daily lives are affected when we fail to get good sleep. Our abilities to focus and concentrate, reason, remember, manage and regulate our emotions and make good judgment calls all suffer.

Quality, good sleep leads to more energy, helps you manage stress, boosts the immune system and improves overall well-being. It is time for your body and mind to rest, recover and recharge and is as important to our health as eating, drinking and breathing. Irregular or disturbed sleep is both a symptom of and can exacerbate or maintain stress, anxiety or depression.

What is sleep?

A condition of body and mind which typically recurs for several hours every night, in which the nervous system is inactive, the eyes closed, the postural muscles relaxed, and consciousness practically suspended.

The Body Clock

Sleep is regulated by an internal 'clock', which is tuned by the day–night cycles (circadian rhythm). When the sun sets, your brain starts to release 'sleepy' chemicals, until eventually you feel the need to retire for the night. In the morning, exposure to daylight prompts your brain to release 'awake' chemicals.

Sleep Stages

We go through various distinct stages of sleep, over and over, every night. Generally, the brain moves from light sleep to deeper sleep and eventually to rapid eye movement, or REM, sleep. REM sleep occurs regularly, about once every 90 to 120 minutes. Brain waves in REM sleep are faster than in non-REM sleep. REM sleep is associated with dreaming and with stimulation of the parts of the brain used for learning, while body repair and growth tends to happen during non REM sleep. It is important to get the right mix of both REM and non-REM sleep to maintain our natural sleep cycle and help us wake rested and refreshed.

There are many good reasons for investing in quality shut-eye:

Sleep keeps your heart healthy

Insufficient poor or disrupted sleep is linked to physical health conditions not least cardiovascular problems including high blood pressure and increased risk of heart attacks due to a surge in stress hormones, compelling your heart to respond by working harder.

Sleep is important for maintaining a healthy weight

Sleeplessness boosts hunger, by decreasing the hormone that signals feeling full and by slowing the rate at which calories are burned. Lack of sleep, therefore, also reduces your ability to resist cravings for junk food.



It keeps you safe

Research shows that sleep deprivation slows your reaction time and reduces your ability to focus. People who are deprived of deep or REM sleep become irritable and at extremes become confused and the boundaries between phantasy and reality can become blurred. People who sleep less than six to seven hours per night are twice as likely to be involved in an accident compared to those who sleep for at least eight hours.

Sleep strengthens your immune system

High-quality rest boosts the immune system by producing proteins to help you fight off colds, flu and other infections and also increases the effectiveness of vaccines.

It can prevent headaches

Sleep deprivation plays an indirect role in decreasing headaches and other medically unexplained symptoms by lowering your tolerance for frustration and making you less able to cope with stress and anxiety.

It keeps you in tip-top shape mentally and physically

Quality sleep is like nature's natural vitamin supplement, improving your speed, hand-eye coordination, reaction time, muscle recovery, and cognitive abilities along with the ability to manage, regulate emotions and cope with the inevitable frustrations and disappointments of daily life.

It boosts your mood

Even one night of sleeplessness can increase your irritability the next day, making you more prone to stress and anxiety. This can have a knock on effect making it harder to fall asleep the next night, so you become trapped in a cycle of sleeplessness, frustration and irritability.

Maintaining healthy relationships

Your sleep habits can have an effect on the people around you, contributing to relationship satisfaction and happiness. Sleep deprivation contributes to irritability, low mood, impatience, distorted negative thinking, pessimism, anxiety and lack of empathy, all of which can keep you awake at night!

So, next time you're tempted to work late or burn the midnight oil, remember - sacrificing sleep could actually put you at a disadvantage. If you've any difficulty getting to sleep, here are some additional tips from that might help:



Good sleep hygiene

Your GP will be able to advise you about what you can do at home to help you sleep. This is known as good sleep hygiene and includes:

- Establishing fixed times for going to bed and waking up (try to avoid sleeping in after a poor night's sleep)
- Trying to relax before going to bed
- Maintaining a comfortable sleeping environment (not too hot, cold, noisy or bright)
- Avoiding napping during the day
- Only using the bedroom for sleeping and sex
- Avoiding caffeine, nicotine and alcohol late at night
- Avoiding exercise within four hours of bedtime (although exercise in the middle of the day is beneficial)
- Avoiding eating a heavy meal late at night
- Avoiding watching or checking the clock throughout the night

Common Sleep Disorders

Sleep can be disturbed in many ways. Some of the more common sleep complaints include:

- Insomnia – difficulties in getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Jet lag – a different time zone throws off the body's internal clock, which takes a few days to reset. Working night shift can mimic the symptoms of jet lag
- Narcolepsy – extreme tiredness with intermittent sleepiness during the day, which can include involuntary napping
- Periodic limb movement disorder (Myoclonus) – muscle spasms of the legs that often wake up the sleeper. This is more common in the middle aged and elderly.
- Restless legs – this feels like cramps or some kind of irritation in the lower legs, which makes the person need to move their legs or get up and walk around
- Snoring – breathing through the mouth while asleep, which is more common in males
- Sleep apnoea – the upper airway is blocked, causing airflow and breathing to stop for a time during sleep
- Sleep starts – common feeling of muscle jerks or a sensation of falling that happens when a person is just going off to sleep
- Sleepwalking – tends to affect children more than adults
- REM sleep behaviour disorder – the sleeper tends to act out what's happening in their dreams, which could mean punching or kicking. es the person need to move their legs or get up and walk around



A Common Complaint

Insomnia is a symptom, not a disease. It means having trouble with how much or how well you sleep. This may be caused by difficulties in either falling or staying asleep.

Self-reported sleeping problems, dissatisfaction with sleep quality and daytime tiredness are the only defining characteristics of insomnia because it is such an individual experience.

Over one-third of people experience insomnia from time to time, but only around 5% need treatment for the condition. Transient or short-term insomnia is typically caused by such things as stressful episodes, jet lag, change in sleeping environments, some acute medical illness and stimulant medications. Normal sleeping habits return once the acute event is over. If a person has sleeping difficulties for a month or more, it is called persistent or chronic insomnia.





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