It's important to treat getting enough sleep as if your life depends on it – because it does.

Sleep is essential to maintaining your physical and mental health. However, many people do not get the seven to nine hours of sleep per 24-hour period recommended for adults.

Fatigue

Fatigue is a byproduct of sleep loss and busy lives. Unmanaged fatigue increases risk for illnesses, accidents, injuries, fatalities and property loss. It is associated with excessive daytime sleepiness, inattention, irritability and diminished productivity.

Sleep Disorders

There are many types of sleep disorders caused by a combination of physical and mental health conditions. Insomnia and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) are among the most common.

Insomnia

Insomnia is difficulty falling or staying asleep over a period of time, not an occasional wakeful night. Recommended remedies may include medication, relaxation training, cognitive behavioral therapy, avoiding stimulants, and using the bedroom exclusively for sleep and intimacy.

OSA disrupts breathing while you are asleep, causing gasping, snoring, restlessness and undetected waking. About half of the estimated 90 million Americans who snore have OSA. Risk factors for OSA include aging, being overweight, having a large neck or narrow airway, smoking and drinking alcohol. Treatment may include losing weight, dental appliances, surgery or use of a device to provide continuous positive airway pressure while asleep.

Pain and chronic or complex sleep-related disorders require a multi-faceted approach to diagnosis, treatment and management.

The quality of your sleep can also be affected by:
- Physical pain
- Substances such as alcohol, caffeine and some drugs
- Smoking cigarettes
- Eating fatty, heavy or spicy foods
- Not getting enough exercise
- Light emitted by electronic devices
- An environment not conducive to rest

Sleep Disruptors

When it seems as if there are not enough hours in the day, tradeoffs are often made with time previously reserved for rest. Stress and anxiety can make it difficult to relax. Commitments to self-care can also end up on the back burner.

Your biological clock, which operates at the cellular level, influences circadian rhythms that follow a dark-light cycle and trigger your brain to release chemicals that promote wakefulness or sleepiness. Circadian rhythms can be disrupted by factors such as:
- Time zone changes
- 24/7 operations
- Caring for a newborn
- Lack of sunlight
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Recommendations

If you or your bed partner have difficulty sleeping, see a medical or behavioral health professional. Here are some ways to improve sleep duration and quality:

1. Set reasonable expectations. If a tendency toward overachievement or time management challenges cause sleeplessness, evaluate “must do’s” and “can waits.” Give yourself credit for accomplishments.

2. Be consistent about when you go to bed and get up, even on your days off.

3. Get daily exercise, eat nutritious foods and manage your weight.

4. Before going to bed:
   • Avoid stimulants such as alcohol and caffeine.
   • Don’t use electronic devices in the bedroom.
   • Relax in a warm bath, do slow breathing or meditate.
   • Limit daytime power naps to 20 minutes.

5. While sleeping:
   • Select a bed/bedding that fits your size and lifestyle.
   • Rest in a cool, dark and quiet room.
   • Use ear plugs or “white noise” to block out sounds.

6. Be health-and-safety conscious:
   • Consult your provider if you are considering or taking sleep aids that cause drowsiness.
   • Be aware of low-energy dips that typically occur before dawn and between 1 and 3 p.m.
   • If you feel drowsy while driving or operating powered equipment, take a rest break.
   • Allow yourself to take the time off that you have earned to rest and recuperate.

7. To avoid travel-related sleep disruption (jet lag):
   • Gradually shift your sleeping pattern to match your planned destination.
   • Set your watch for the arrival time zone.
   • Arrive in the early evening so you can go to sleep by 10 p.m.
   • Allow time to adjust to higher elevations; oxygen levels influence sleep quality.

Sleeping pills have not been shown to resolve biological imbalance caused by jet lag. Consult with your medical provider if you are considering taking the hormone melatonin, a supplement sold as a circadian rhythm control mechanism.

Caffeine Fast Facts

• Caffeine is the most commonly used stimulant in the world.
• Coffee may enhance weight loss, cognitive function and alertness.
• You shouldn’t depend on caffeine in beverages and food products to stay awake.
• Caffeine may have a negative impact on fertility, pregnancy and glucose control.
• Energy drinks containing high levels of caffeine should not be mixed with alcohol.

Source: Medical News Today

"It’s possible to catch up on lost sleep to some extent, but it takes a lot more than a few hours of extra shut eye to pay off sleep debt accrued over time."