

WELL BALANCED

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Better Sleep Month

Sleep AND YOUR Health—WHAT TO KNOW AND WHAT TO DO



According to health experts, getting enough quality sleep is one of the most beneficial steps to protect your overall health. Sleep directly impacts both physical and mental well-being. Healthy sleep involves not only getting enough hours, but also ensuring those hours are restful and restorative. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults age 18 and older get at least seven hours of sleep each night for health benefits.

Health Benefits of Sleep

Adequate rest can improve mood and boost energy levels, while also enhancing attention and focus. REM sleep, the stage associated with dreaming, is especially important for cognitive function. During this phase, the brain processes information, strengthens learning, and improves memory retention. As a result, sufficient sleep is tied to greater mental clarity and better concentration, according to the Sleep Foundation.

Sleep also plays a key role in physical health. People who consistently get enough sleep are sick less, more likely to maintain a healthy weight, and have overall better heart health. Adequate sleep is associated with lower risks of chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke, according to the CDC. Prioritizing sleep is one of the most effective ways to support overall long-term health.



Did You Know?

If you find yourself awake for more than 15 minutes, it can be helpful to get out of bed and do something calming until you feel sleepy.

Signs of Poor-Quality Sleep

Lack of sleep is considered chronic when it occurs at least three nights per week for three months or more. Some signs that you may be experiencing sleep problems include:

- Trouble falling asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep
- Experiencing daytime fatigue, even after getting the recommended hours of sleep
- Impaired thinking, memory, or focus.

Risks of Chronic Poor Sleep

While the occasional restless night is normal, chronic sleep deprivation can contribute to a range of serious health issues, affecting both the body and the brain. Averaging five hours of sleep per night increases the risk of obesity by 50%, due to higher levels of the hunger hormone and lower levels of the appetite control hormone, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine. Insufficient sleep is also linked to cardiovascular concerns, including a 48% higher risk of developing heart disease, along with an increased likelihood of high blood pressure, stroke, and heart attack. Chronic sleep loss nearly triples the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It has also been associated with a higher risk of certain cancers and a weakened immune system, making individuals up to three times more likely to catch a cold.

The brain is equally affected. Chronic sleep deprivation is linked to cognitive decline and dementia, impaired memory and attention, slower reaction time, and reduced decision-making ability. It can also contribute to depression and anxiety.

Strategies to Improve Sleep

If you're looking to improve your sleep—whether it's quality, quantity, or both—making intentional changes to your habits and routines can make a meaningful difference.

- Develop consistent sleep habits by waking up and going to bed at the same time each day. Aim for at least seven hours of sleep per night to support overall health and well-being. Try to get natural light early in the day and keep naps short and scheduled earlier as well.
- Establish a bedtime routine that includes a relaxing wind-down ritual such as stretching, deep breathing, meditation, journaling, or reading. Finding what works for you can help signal to your body that it's time for rest.
- Create a sleep-friendly environment by reserving your bedroom for sleep. Keep the room cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable to promote better sleep.
- Monitor screentime by avoiding electronic devices such as smartphones, computers, or tablets for at least 30 minutes prior to sleep. Blue light emitted from these devices can suppress melatonin production and disrupt the natural sleep-wake cycle, according to the Sleep Foundation.
- Incorporate daily physical activity to support overall health and well-being, make it easier to fall asleep, and improve sleep quality. The American Heart Association (AHA) notes that some research suggests exercising in the morning may help regulate the sleep-wake cycle. Keep in mind that engaging in vigorous physical activity too close to bedtime may make it more difficult to fall asleep.
- Balance what you eat and when you eat it. Following a dietary pattern rich in fiber-filled vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains, while limiting processed foods and sugary drinks, may help support more restful sleep. Consume caffeine earlier in the day, and limit alcohol and nicotine use, particularly in the evening.



The Sleep Foundation recommends limiting naps to 20-30 minutes, as longer naps may interfere with nighttime sleep.

If you are experiencing any of the following, it may be time to talk with your health care provider.

- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at least three nights per week for more than a month
- Sleep issues that are impacting your mood, energy, focus, or daily functioning
- Difficulty falling asleep without over-the-counter sleep aids or other substances
- Loud snoring, gasping for air during sleep, or concerns about a possible sleep disorder
- Ongoing daytime exhaustion despite efforts to improve sleep hygiene

Resources

- » Better Sleep Month (bettersleep.org)

Sources

- » <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/sleep/sleep-better-with-healthy-lifestyle-habits>
- » <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/sleep/sleep-your-way-to-a-smarter-brain>
- » <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/physical-health>
- » <https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about/index.html>
- » <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-effects-of-sleep-deprivation>

