HEALTH AT A GLANCE

Do Your Sleep Habits Need a Wake Up Call?

A good night's rest is often considered a luxury, but the truth is, sleep is crucial to mental and physical health, quality of life and safety.

Are you getting enough sleep at night? According to the National Sleep Foundation, adults need about 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. However, busy schedules, stress and Jimmy Kimmel can often interfere with our sleep time. This is a bigger problem than most people realize, since regularly skimping on sleep can impact almost every area of our lives.

Consequences of Sleep Deprivation

Impaired Mental Abilities: Just one night of sleep deprivation reduces alertness, concentration, memory and problem-solving abilities, while increasing reaction time, mistakes and forgetfulness. Being less productive is also a side effect; it's estimated that sleep problems cost employers over $60 billion each year in lost productivity.

Increased Risk of Accidents: Falling short on sleep can increase the risk for accidents. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that fatigue causes more than 100,000 accidents each year, killing over 15,000 people. Sleep loss also increases the risk of on-the-job accidents and injuries.

Emotional Health: We've all felt irritable after a bad night's sleep, but the emotional effects go beyond that. Skimping on zzzz's makes it more difficult to manage stress, anger and other emotions. Long-term sleep deprivation can increase the risk of depression.

Weight Gain: When compared to people who log 7 to 9 hours of sleep, those who regularly get 6 hours of sleep or less are up to 35% more likely to be obese.

Illness Risk: Sleep deprived employees take more sick days; chronic sleep deprivation can increase the risk of a variety diseases, including hypertension, heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Improve Your Snooze

Get more sleep by following these tips from the National Sleep Foundation:

Stick to a Consistent Sleep Schedule. Yep, this includes weekends. A regular schedule helps regulate your body's clock, which can help you fall asleep - and stay asleep.

Establish a Relaxing Bedtime Routine. Avoid stressful activities in the few hours before bed. Replace these with relaxing activities that help you wind down, like stretching or reading.

Monitor Naps. Naps lasting longer than 30 minutes can make it difficult to fall asleep at night. Instead, limit naps to 15-20 minutes for an energy boost that won't affect your slumber later.

Exercise Consistently. Physical activity makes it easier to fall asleep and helps you sleep better. For some people, exercising in the evening can make it difficult to sleep. If you regularly have problems falling asleep, consider moving your exercise time to earlier in the day.

Evaluate Your Sleep Environment. Design your bedroom for the conditions you need for better sleep. Your bedroom should be cool (60ºF-67ºF), quiet and dark. Try blackout curtains, eye masks, ear plugs, white noise machines, fans, relaxation CDs and lowering your thermostat overnight.

Avoid Alcohol, Caffeine, Tobacco and Heavy Meals in the Evening. Alcohol, nicotine and caffeine can disrupt sleep, while eating big or spicy meals can cause indigestion.

Monitor Your Use of Electronic Devices. Using electronic devices, like laptops or TVs, can make it hard to fall asleep, because the light coming from the screens of these devices is activating to the brain. If you have trouble sleeping, power down your devices an hour or two before bed.

Key Websites:

www.sleepfoundation.org
www.bettersleep.org
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

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