

Are You Getting Enough Zzzzz's?

May is Better Sleep Month

DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

Lack of quality sleep can not only impair your physical health, but also your emotional well-being. Research has shown that sleep deprivation and irregular sleep patterns can weaken the immune system or your body's ability to handle illness and disease. The effects of inadequate sleep include heart disease, hypertension, slurred speech, and tremors, not to mention slower reaction times, difficulty managing stress, and poor memory functioning. Sleep disturbance is one of the symptoms of mood disorders such as depression. But, studies have found that sleep deprivation can also "trigger" depression and mood disorders. Sleep deprivation has also been found to be associated with weight gain, as lack of sleep interferes with hormone levels including those regulating appetite. As you can see, getting enough quality sleep is important for your overall health.

Tips for Better Sleep

Use the following tips to help you fall asleep and to improve the quality of your sleep. Studies have shown that most people need at least 7-9 hours a night to feel rested.

- Avoid eating a large meal before bedtime. Try to have your last meal at least 3-4 hours prior to bedtime. However, if you are hungry, a light snack such as yogurt or crackers may be eaten.
- Develop a relaxing bedtime "ritual" to help your body and mind prepare for sleep. Taking a warm shower/bath, reading, or listening to soft music may help you fall asleep.
- Use your bed/bedroom only for sleeping and sex. Your bed/bedroom should be a place of relaxation, a "sanctuary." Don't do work or surf on the Internet in bed.
- If, after 10-15 minutes of lying in bed, you are unable to fall asleep, get up, go to another room and engage in something relaxing such as reading or watching TV until you get sleepy.
- Doing at least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise, especially in the morning, has been found to be helpful in improving sleep. Avoid any strenuous exercise several hours before bedtime, although doing some light stretching or yoga may help you relax.
- Keep a regular sleep-wake schedule. That is, get up and go to bed at the same time each day. Staying up or sleeping in during the weekend will interfere with your sleep pattern.
- Stop consuming caffeinated products by mid-afternoon.
- Make sure your bedroom is conducive for sleep. That is, reduce room noise, use low lighting, and keep a comfortable room temperature (60-70 degrees is recommended).

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