

Why Sleep Is Good For You - and Skimping on It Isn't

Does it really matter if you get enough sleep?

Absolutely! Not only does the quantity of your sleep matter, but the quality of your sleep is important as well. People whose sleep is interrupted a lot or is cut short might not get enough of certain stages of sleep. In other words, how well rested you are and how well you function the next day depend on your total sleep time and how much of the various stages of sleep you get each night.

Performance: We need sleep to think clearly, react quickly, and create memories. In fact, the pathways in the brain that help us learn and remember are very active when we sleep. Studies show that people who are taught mentally challenging tasks do better after a good night's sleep. Other research suggests that sleep is needed for creative problem solving. Skimping on sleep has a price. Cutting back by even 1 hour can make it tough to focus the next day and can slow your response time. Studies also find that when you lack sleep, you are more likely to make bad decisions and take more risks. This can result in lower performance on the job and a greater risk for a crash.

Mood: Sleep also affects mood. Insufficient sleep can make you irritable and is linked to poor behavior and trouble with relationships, especially among children and teens. People who chronically lack sleep are also more likely to become depressed.

Health: Sleep is also important for good health. Studies show that not getting enough sleep or getting poor quality sleep on a regular basis increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions. In addition, during sleep, your body produces valuable hormones. Deep sleep triggers more release of growth hormone, which fuels growth in children, and helps build muscle mass and repair cells and tissues in children and adults. Another type of hormone that increases during sleep works to fight various infections. This might explain why a good night's sleep helps keep you from getting sick—and helps you recover when you do get sick. Hormones released during sleep also affect how the body uses energy. Studies find that the less people sleep, the more likely they are to be overweight or obese, to develop diabetes, and to prefer eating foods that are high in calories and carbohydrates.

Source: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/healthysleepfs.pdf>



"If you have trouble falling asleep, lick your feet for a few minutes. It works for my cat!"

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