

# Are You Sleeping?

Without enough shut-eye, you may be missing more than sweet dreams.

by *Chrystle Fiedler*

**W**hen the alarm goes off in the morning, are you ready for anything or just a cup of coffee? By the middle of the day, are you at your best or longing for a nap? At night, are you ready to call it a day, or are you having trouble turning out the lights? If you're like many, you may be missing a good night's sleep. And while we may joke about a lack of "beauty rest," when it comes to our health and well-being, there's a lot more to sleep than meets the eye.

The consequence is that we're sleep deprived and cannot function at our peak levels."

## Why We Need Those ZZZ's

Not getting enough sleep can have major implications. "Insufficient sleep has a negative impact on your entire body—on your cardiovascular system, your immune system and your ability to manage and cope with what you have on your plate," says Dr. Helene Emsellem, director of The Center for Sleep & Wake Disorders in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and a spokesperson for the National Sleep Foundation. "We've also seen a relationship between insufficient sleep and obesity." Sleep deprivation can even be dangerous—especially if you're behind the wheel of a car. A study in the journal of Academic Emergency Medicine showed that 17 percent of sleep-deprived medical interns at Wayne State University had a car accident after falling asleep at the wheel.

Lack of sleep also affects learning, concentration, memory and mood. "I like to think of the brain as a multi-sensory digital camera on auto-shoot," says Emsellem. "During the day, your brain is taking pictures. At night, we take the information from the day, sort it, incorporate it into new memories, make new connections and learn from it."

## Not Enough Sleep

Busy schedules, the overuse of caffeine and poor sleep habits all contribute to a lack of sleep. But for some people, sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, are the cause. "Sleep apnea is a disorder where you actually stop breathing numerous times during your sleep," says Miller. "Sleep becomes very fragmented. It's not restful or restorative."

The biggest push now is the recognition that heart failure patients are affected by sleep apnea. You should consult your doctor about the possibility of sleep apnea if you have high blood pressure, feel excessively tired during the day or if you snore loudly at night. He or she may refer you to a sleep disorder physician.

For the rest of us who are sleep deprived, we often try to "catch up" on sleep on the weekends, but this isn't the best



Unfortunately, sleep often is one of the first things we sacrifice in our over-scheduled lives. According to the National Sleep Foundation, 50 million Americans suffer from sleep deprivation. Most of us average 6.7 hours, well below the sleep experts' suggested 7 to 9 hours a night. "If we need extra time, we take it from our sleep," says Bernie W. Miller, supervisor of the Mayo Clinic Hospital Sleep Disorders Center in Phoenix, Arizona. "We either stay up later or get up earlier to get something done.

strategy. That's because if you don't get up and go to bed at about the same time, you throw off your internal clock and make it more difficult for your body to know when it's bedtime. "When people try to reduce their sleep debt on the weekend, they end up jet-lagging themselves," says Joyce A. Walsleben, Ph.D., associate professor at the New York University School of Medicine and a member of the university's Sleep Disorders Center. Some people get so out of balance on the weekend, she notes, "They may as well have gone to Paris by the time Sunday night comes, because they can't fall asleep."



To break this cycle, Walsleben suggests adding sleep in 15-minute increments. "Each week, either go to bed 15 minutes earlier or stay in bed 15 minutes longer." Then, the next week, add another 15 minutes. Before you know it, you've added a half an hour every night, a huge difference.

"It's very easy to do, it doesn't disrupt your rhythm and nothing is that important that you can't give 15 minutes up," says Walsleben. "You'll find that it's very gradual, but you'll suddenly realize, 'Gee, I'm feeling better. I'm working better. I'm happier.' Basically, the time you put in sleeping pays off during the day." **T**

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## UP ALL NIGHT?

Use these tips to get through the next day.

- Don't dwell on your lack of sleep. Focus your energies on the day ahead.
- Resist the urge to overload on coffee and sugar to compensate.
- Get outside and take a walk.
- Take a brief 20-minute nap. Just don't nod off in the early evening, or you might impact another night's sleep.
- Go to bed at your regular time and exaggerate your wind-down routine.
- If you continue to have trouble sleeping, see your doctor.

## 9 Tips for a Good Night's Sleep



If sleep is elusive, make sure you're covering these bedtime basics.



**ESTABLISH** a regular routine. While it's not always possible to go to bed at the same time, aim for a consistent 15- to 20-minute time frame every day of the week, including weekends. Incorporate a daily wind-down routine to help you relax.



**MODIFY** caffeine consumption. Limit your intake to one or two 8 oz. cups in the morning so that the caffeine works its way out of your system by evening.



**AVOID** alcohol and nicotine, especially in the evening. Alcohol is a sedative that can aggravate sleep disorders like sleep apnea. Nicotine is a stimulant that will rev you up.



**LIMIT** fluids before going to sleep.



**RESIST** heavy meals close to bedtime. But don't go to bed hungry; it tends to keep you awake.



**EXERCISE** regularly, but ideally no later than three hours before bedtime. Exercise raises your body temperature and delays the onset of sleep. If it gets too late for your workout, try relaxing yoga stretches instead.



**DON'T** take the laptop to bed. The brightness of the computer screen late at night can influence your body clock, wake you up and make it more difficult to go to sleep.



**GET UP** and do something else if you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes. Return to bed when you're drowsy.



**PRAY.** Relaxing and restorative, prayer is a good way to end the day on a thankful, reflective, hopeful note that helps set aside the worries of the day.

For more information, visit [www.thrivent.com/magazine/links](http://www.thrivent.com/magazine/links) for a link to the National Sleep Foundation's Web site. —C.F.