

# Sleep essential for physical, emotional health

Numerous studies have proven the physical and emotional health benefit of getting 7-8 hours of sleep per night. It can even help one lose weight, with a Brigham Young University study revealing that higher quality sleep of 8.5 hours a night is associated with a lower body fat percentage.



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"Various studies have proven the power of regular, sufficient and quality sleep with results showing a marked increase in memory, learning, creativity, productivity, emotional stability and physical health. The Ryerson University of Toronto found that curing insomnia in people with depression doubled their chance of a full recovery," says Doctor Jacques Snyman, clinical advisor for Resolution Health Medical Scheme.

"If you don't maintain a consistent and unvarying sleeping pattern, it can cause problems with your circadian rhythm, the 24-hour cycle in the physiological processes of humans. When the body's circadian clock is thrown off by external factors, such as a lack of sleep or jetlag, it has an adverse effect on the hormones and the body's internal structure, ultimately affecting weight loss."

An inadequate amount of sleep can also result in a number of negative implications for one's health, including obesity, hypertension, heart and blood vessel disease and diabetes, as well as possible harmful effects on mental health.

"Lifestyle plays a significant role in the development of certain diseases and it is critical for people to understand that simple changes to their daily routine, such as getting enough sleep, consuming less alcohol, factoring exercise into their schedule and giving up smoking, can improve their health and strongly reduce the risk of contracting certain diseases."

## Why 8 hours?

Sleep progresses in stages, each of which is vital to optimum mental and physical health. To get the most out of each stage, one must allow one's body enough time to naturally progress from one to the other.

The point where one hovers between being awake and asleep is known as stage one of sleep and serves as the lead in to

stage two sleep. During this phase, one starts to become disengaged from one's surroundings and one's body temperature starts to drop.

Stage three is the deepest, most restorative and most important phase. During this stage, blood pressure drops, breathing becomes slower and blood supply to your muscles increases substantially. This phase is associated with tissue growth and repairs, energy restoration and the release of various hormones.

The first Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep cycle occurs approximately 90 minutes after falling asleep and reoccurs every 90 minutes thereafter, increasing in length the longer one is asleep. The less one sleeps, the less REM cycles one goes through. Energy is provided to the body and brain while one's body and muscles are completely relaxed.

## **Sleep tips**

- Where possible, stick to a regular routine of going to bed and waking up at the same time
- Incorporate a relaxing pre-sleep ritual into your daily routine. Examples include having a warm bath, reading a book or having a warm cup of herbal tea
- Exercise daily
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, coffee and heavy meals 2 - 3 hours before bedtime
- Create a sleep inducing environment: dark, quiet and cool

"Getting sufficient sleep is one of the easiest ways to improve one's lifestyle and basic health. Thankfully, it's a rather enjoyable activity to add to one's New Year's Resolution list and not hard to incorporate into everyday life," Snyman concludes.

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