

What you should know about **SLEEP**

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THE LIFE EXTENSION FOUNDATION | GUIDE TO BETTER HEALTH



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SLEEP IS AS IMPORTANT as the air we breathe or the food we eat. Without sleep, many of us would die from exhaustion within a week. Just as the body must have activity to live, it also must have adequate rest to live at its best. Sleep is the only means by which we can gain this rest.

Sleep results from fatigue produced as waste products are given off by the numerous muscles within the body. When we are active during the day, the constant contractions of our muscles produce certain chemicals which are normally disposed of as waste. But while we are active, our bodies cannot dispose of the waste at a rate sufficient to prevent fatigue.

The body needs to be completely idle for a sufficient length of time to permit the elimination of waste products. After adequate sleep, the body is as good as new and ready for fresh assignments. But if sleep is insufficient, the result is a feeling of fatigue because the body has not eliminated all its waste.

Sleep is also the brain's automatic reaction to a busy day in which millions upon millions of sensory impulses traveled over an incredibly complex network of nerves to activate the brain.

One noted science writer, John Pfeiffer, author of *The Human Brain*, likens this activity to a world that "breaks like an unceasing and rhythmical surf on our minds. If we had no relief from this nagging barrage of sensations, we would all be psychotic. Fortunately, things are so designed that relief comes at fairly regular intervals in the form of sleep."

When all is said and done, you must depend upon your night of sleep for real rest and relaxation. For

without sleep, you experience fatigue. Fatigue is not an organic disease. It is not a cancer, not a liver ailment, not a malfunctioning kidney, not a bad heart. You can be completely free of organic troubles, yet if you experience fatigue, you are robbed of a sense of well-being. You lose your zest, your ability to think straight, your feeling of cheer. You find the hours dragging and your attentiveness to conversation lagging.

At the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington, D. C., hundreds of volunteers, among them doctors, have been scientifically subjected to varying degrees of sleeplessness. Some have gone as long as 240 consecutive hours without sleep. One of the principal purposes of these experiments has been to show the importance of sleep by what happens when we are deprived of it.

These experiments have confirmed the widely held belief that without adequate sleep the entire human body—the mind as well as the vital organs—is subject to the numerous harmful effects of stress. The effects vary according to the individual and with the amount of sleep deprivation.

After some 65 hours of sleeplessness, one human guinea pig was found in a washroom. He was frantically trying to wash away the cobwebs which he said covered his face. Even after he had rested, he insisted that the cobwebs "were there all right." Of course, they weren't.

For years I have been convinced that if you regularly go without adequate sleep you are reducing your chances for normal longevity. I believe that the effects of sleeplessness are cumulative and that the damage to your health is permanent and irre-

versible. It is perhaps no accident that so many family doctors do not live out their normal life spans. So many of them go week after week on far less sleep than men in other walks of life.

A disease to which you are ordinarily immune may well make you one of its victims if it strikes after prolonged periods of inadequate sleep. As Dr. Edmund Jacobson, director of the Chicago Laboratory for Clinical Physiology, has said: "The effects of inadequate sleep are hard to measure: a little less zeal and ambition, an extra cold, or perhaps a more serious disease which might otherwise have passed you by..."

There are some slight variations in the total amount of sleep each of us should have every day. But the great majority—perhaps nine out of ten—should get no less than eight hours sleep a night. I have put this down as the irreducible minimum for nearly all my patients.

I know many persons, particularly active businessmen and professionals carrying added burdens of civic responsibilities in their communities, who have gone along for years on no more than four, five, or six hours sleep each night. A very few of them, perhaps, do not and will not suffer adverse mental or physical effects. But I wouldn't gamble on it. Often we don't know how they are getting along until it is too late.

I want to repeat emphatically my belief, based on painstaking observations and records, that most of those who do not get eight hours sleep regularly are definitely reducing their full life expectancy.

There are a great many of us who think we are

exceptional; we can buck the laws of nature and get away with it. This is especially true of younger, more energetic men, the kind who want to race to the top and won't pause to look at the wreckage they are leaving behind.

If you happen to be one of those who thinks he can get along on less than eight hours sleep each night, I strongly urge you to talk it over with your doctor.

We often hear of the "Edisons" of life, the men who live enormously productive lives well into their 70s and 80s and never get more than four or five hours sleep each night. Yet it has been my experience that many of these reputations are unwarranted or, at least, are only partially true. Edison, for instance, was said never to have slept more than four hours a night. But we know he took frequent and prolonged naps during the day.

A WIDESPREAD misconception is that an hour's sleep before midnight is worth two after midnight. Another myth is that four or five hours of sound sleep are equal to eight or ten hours of restless slumber. There is no substitute for the total number of hours of sleep required. However, a sound, minimum eight-hour sleep is certainly better than an eight-hour sleep that is not quite so sound.

So many of us believe that we are victims of insomnia; we can't sleep even when we desperately want to. However, we know that there normally is no such person as a true "insomniac." Prolonged though the effort may be, sooner or later the "insomniac" is going to fall asleep.

Here are some suggestions which have been found

It's nature's magic restorative, banishing fatigue for well-being and alertness; here's how to be sure you get enough of it

to be especially useful for difficult sleepers:

1. Try to keep your hours of sleep as regular as possible. Don't be afraid to experiment for a while to see which hours suit you best. You'll know which hours are right for you as soon as you start getting up each morning feeling refreshed and full of zest, and can go through the day with little or no fatigue.

2. Sleep in a dark and quiet room. This is the best setting for relaxing the mind and body. Quite a number of gadgets have been developed to help shut out light and sound. These may be employed for a few nights, but they should not be relied upon.

3. Make every effort to relax your body physically. Do a little moderate exercise before going to bed. A brief walk in the fresh air just before retiring may do the trick. Also helpful is a warm bath for about 15 to 20 minutes.

The surest way not to sleep is to try consciously to force yourself to sleep. Such an attempt is usually combined with the fear that sleep will be a long time in coming.

Sleep is largely a matter of habit. You can't turn it on and off at will and expect to acquire the benefits of prompt, sound sleep. If you make going to bed a fairly fixed but relaxed routine, you are certainly apt to have less trouble falling soundly asleep.

4. Avoid excessive stimulation late in the day. Stay away from competitive sports late in the afternoon. Don't go to a night baseball game unless you can be sure of remaining placid. Don't get into nighttime arguments. If you're doing concentrated mental work, put it away at least an hour before retiring, especially if it is related to your occupation. Then read something entirely unrelated to

your work—anything that doesn't call for concentrated thinking.

5. If you must have a drink before bed, stick to warm milk. It has a relaxing effect. Tea and coffee contain caffeine which tends to stimulate.

6. Try to prepare for sleep by slowing down at least an hour before getting into bed. Start turning your thoughts to the more pleasant memories of the day or to the pleasant events ahead. Don't make a mental review of your problems.

7. Don't count sheep. This "trick" is too closely linked with worry over sleep. Like muscular effort, mental activity while lying in bed can interfere with sleep, especially if it is so closely associated with your anxiety over sleep. Just relax!

8. Finally, remember that lying quietly in bed for several hours, even though sleep does not come, is better than getting up and fussing around. Be consoled by the fact that a quiet, horizontal body is a body at rest. You will find that the more you lie quietly in bed, the more you will learn to relax; each night you will fall asleep sooner than you think.

If any sedatives are taken, it should be under the guidance of your physician. Sleeping pills may be used to advantage, but only if the use is like that of a crutch to help you limp on a sprained ankle until the ankle is strong enough to support your weight. Prolonged use of sleeping pills may cause you to develop a tolerance for the medication, and then it won't do you any good unless the dose is greatly increased.

One final word: if none of this advice works for you, it's time to visit your doctor!