

Your Guide to Healthy Sleep



What is sleep?

Sleep has specific stages that cycle throughout the night. Your brain stays active throughout sleep, but different things happen during each stage. For instance, certain stages of sleep are needed for us to feel well rested and energetic the next day; other stages help us learn or make memories. Sleep helps maintain good health and enable people to function at their best. Not getting enough sleep can be dangerous.

How much sleep is enough?

Sleep needs vary from person to person, and they change throughout your life. Most adults need 7-8 hours of sleep each night. School-aged children and teens need at least 9 hours of sleep a night.

Performance

We need sleep to think clearly, react quickly, and create memories. Studies show that people who are taught challenging tasks do better after a good night's sleep. Other research suggests that sleep is needed for creative problem solving. 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 or in school and a greater risk for a car crash.

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

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. During sleep, your body produces valuable hormones. One 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.

