Me

All About Sleep
And How To Get More Of It

Sleep is an essential function that allows your body and mind to recharge, leaving you refreshed and alert when you wake up. Healthy sleep also helps the body remain healthy and stave off diseases. Without enough sleep, the brain cannot function properly. This can impair your abilities to concentrate, think clearly, and process memories.

Work schedules, day-to-day stressors, a disruptive bedroom environment, and medical conditions can all prevent us from receiving enough sleep. A healthy diet and positive lifestyle habits can help ensure an adequate amount of sleep each night – but for some, chronic lack of sleep may be the first sign of a sleep disorder.

The science behind sleep

An internal "body clock" regulates your sleep cycle, controlling when you feel tired and ready for bed or refreshed and alert. This clock operates on a 24-hour cycle known as the circadian rhythm. After waking up from sleep, you'll become increasingly tired throughout the day. These feelings will peak in the evening leading up to bedtime.

This sleep drive – also known as sleep-wake homeostasis – is linked to adenosine, an organic compound produced in the brain. Adenosine levels increase throughout the day as you become more tired, and then the body breaks down this compound during sleep.

Light also influences the circadian rhythm. The brain contains a special region of nerve cells known as the hypothalamus, and a cluster of cells in the hypothalamus called the suprachiasmatic nucleus, which processes signals when the eyes are exposed to natural or artificial light. These signals help the brain determine whether it is day or night.

As natural light disappears in the evening, the body will release melatonin, a hormone that induces drowsiness. When the sun rises in the morning, the body will release the hormone known as cortisol that promotes energy and alertness.

How much sleep do we need?

There is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to sleep. The right amount of sleep largely depends on your age.

Age Group	Age Range	Recommended Amount of Sleep per Day
Infant	4-12 months	12-16 hours
Toddler	1-2 years	11-14 hours
Preschool	3-5 years	10-13 hours
School-age	6-12 years	9-12 hours
Teen	13-18 years	8-10 hours
Adult	18 years and older	7 hours or more

The importance of getting enough sleep

For most adults, at least seven hours of sleep each night is needed for proper cognitive and behavioral functions. An insufficient amount of sleep can lead to serious repercussions. Some studies have shown sleep deprivation leaves people vulnerable to attention lapses, reduced cognition, delayed reactions, and mood shifts.

It's also been suggested that people can develop a sort of tolerance to chronic sleep deprivation. Even though their brains and bodies struggle due to lack of sleep, they may not be aware of their own deficiencies because less sleep feels normal to them. Additionally, lack of sleep has been linked to a higher risk for certain diseases and medical conditions. These include obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, poor mental health, and early death.

It's never too late to start prioritizing your sleep. You can start by implementing some positive lifestyle and sleep habits in order to log the seven hours you need.

These include:
- Establish a realistic bedtime and stick to it every night, even on the weekends

- Maintain comfortable temperature settings and low light levels in your bedroom

- Keep a comfortable sleep environment by ensuring you have the best mattress, best pillows, and best sheets for your sleep preferences

- Consider a "screen ban" on televisions, computers and tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices in your bedroom

- Abstain from caffeine, alcohol, and large meals in the hours leading up to bedtime

- Refrain from using tobacco at any time of day or night

- Exercise during the day; this can help you wind down in the evening and prepare for sleep.

If you think you may have a sleep disorder, and none of the above suggestions help improve your sleep, then it might be a good idea to go to see a medical doctor for professional advice or medication.