

Are you getting enough sleep?

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, more than 70 million Americans have a sleep disorder, and most are completely unaware that they could be getting better sleep. Inadequate sleep can cause impaired memory and thought processes, depression, increased perception of pain and decreased immune response.

Sleep also seems to affect weight, as your body responds to a lack of sleep by craving more fuel, particularly foods high in fat and carbohydrates. A 2004 study showed that people who slept less than six hours per night were almost 30% more likely to become obese than those who slept more.

While the necessary amount of sleep varies from person to person, most adults need seven to eight hours a day. However, some people may need as few as five or as many as 10, and pregnant women in their first trimester often need several more hours of sleep each day than they did before getting pregnant. If you feel drowsy during the day, even when you are bored, you haven't had enough sleep.

Sleep and work

While many of us wear our sleep deprivation as a badge of honor, the lack of importance our society places on sleep is having serious effects. A study published in the January 2010 issue of the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine found that annual fatigue-related productivity costs came to about \$1,967 per employee. Those who weren't getting enough sleep were significantly less productive, performed worse and had more accidents on the job than workers who were getting adequate rest.

Common treatments

If you aren't getting enough sleep, speak with your doctor. There are many treatments available to help you, including:

- › Bright light therapy. Spending even a short amount of time each day in front of very bright lights can help to reset your internal clock. The time of day and type of light therapy depends on the sleep problem you have.
- › Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Relaxation training and biofeedback, stimulus control, sleep restriction, cognitive control and psychotherapy are treatments typically used for insomnia. These therapies address the underlying cause of your sleep problem.
- › Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). This treatment for obstructive sleep apnea involves wearing a mask that blows air into the back of your throat while you sleep to keep the airway open.
- › Oral appliances. Mouth guards like those worn for sports can protect your teeth if you grind them in your sleep. They can also help with snoring and obstructive sleep apnea.
- › Medications or nutritional supplements. Medications are available to treat many sleep problems, and certain nutritional supplements may offer some benefit as well.
- › Surgery. Some sleep problems, such as obstructive sleep apnea, may require surgery.

