

Healthy Sleep

Sleep is an important part of a healthy lifestyle for children and adults. More than just helping us feel rested, sleep is important in muscle repair and the release of hormones that control growth and hunger. Adequate sleep helps to form memories, concentrate, and make clear decisions. If we don't get enough sleep we are more likely to get sick, as it is essential to a healthy immune system. Not getting enough sleep may also put a person at risk for diabetes, obesity, heart disease and depression.

Our sleep requirements will naturally change throughout our lives. From birth to 2 months, infants need 12-18 hours of sleep each day. From 3-11 months they need 14-15 hours. This includes naps during the day. From 1-3 years, children need 12-14 hours of sleep. Children age 3-5 need 11-13 hours of sleep and children age 5-10 need 10-11 hours. Adolescents (10-17 years) need 8.5-9.5 hours of sleep. Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep.

It is one thing to know sleep is important and another to be able to get enough sleep. Here are some tips for children and adults to help fall asleep, stay asleep and have good quality sleep.

- Establish a routine sleep schedule for your child. Follow this on weekends, too, as much as possible. Having a soothing bedtime routine may also help your child fall asleep easily. A routine can be helpful for adults as well.
- Be conscious of the sleep environment. The room should be dark, cool and quiet. Children may want to have a special blanket or toy to sleep with.
- Adults who have trouble sleeping may want to move clocks so that they can't be seen while trying to fall asleep.
- If possible, avoid watching TV, using the computer, or playing video games right before bed as these can interfere with sleep. Consider keeping TVs and computers out of bedrooms, especially children's bedrooms.
- Regular exercise can help to promote sleep, but try not to exercise too close to bedtime. Your body needs some time to cool down after exercise.
- What you eat and drink before bedtime is important. Avoid caffeine and alcohol in the hours before going to sleep and avoid heavy meals before sleeping. If you or your child wakes up hungry during the night, consider having a small snack before bedtime. A good choice is something that combines whole grains with protein, like whole wheat crackers and milk or half a cheese sandwich.

It is not always easy for children and adults to get enough sleep, but it is worth the effort to make sleep a priority for your family. It will help keep the whole gang healthy and feeling ready to face your busy lives.

Resources and references:

The Sleep Foundation at: <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at: <http://www.cdc.gov/features/sleep/>

(This article is not meant to be a substitute for medical advice or care. Please seek medical care from your own health care provider.)

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