

The Wellness News

Issue 29, March 2010



The Importance of Quality Sleep

Are you getting enough sleep? If you are an American adult, chances are you do not get nearly enough, yet quality sleep is essential to good health. Chronic sleep deprivation is linked with all sorts of health complications including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression. In addition, not getting enough sleep can lead to irritability, increased risk of falls or accidents, poor performance at work or school, and falling asleep during daily activities. Here we will cover the importance of sleep as well as what you can do to improve your sleeping habits.

Understanding the Importance of Sleep

Although sleeping may seem like a passive activity, our bodies are actually hard at work repairing and rejuvenating our systems. Our bodies go through five different sleep cycles, each of which plays an important role in revitalizing our bodies. Some of the areas affected during these cycles include:

Cerebrum: Our brains are so active during the day that sleep comes as a well-deserved break, decreasing the cerebrum metabolism and the blood flow to the brain. This allows for repairs to cellular damage, replenishing of diminished cell energy stores, and provides time for nerve cell growth in the brain.

Memory: During the REM (rapid eye movement) sleep cycle, our brains process and organize our memories. This procedure not only helps us to recall memories, it also promotes learning retention and improves our concentration when we are awake.

Immune System: Research continues to show that a lack of deep sleep results in a reduction in the body's ability to fight off disease. Without adequate sleep, the immune system seems to weaken and the body becomes vulnerable to infection.

Nervous System: Sleep gives the body time to rest and repair the neurons located in the nervous system. This system is responsible for everyday functions including voluntary actions like moving your arm and involuntary actions, such as breathing. It is essential that the nervous system performs at its peak.

Although the amount of sleep you need can depend on many different factors, doctors recommend aiming for 7-8 hours each night. It is important to remember that quality of sleep is just as important as quantity!

The Wellness News

More...

Improve Your Quality of Sleep

Now that you know how important sleep is to your overall health, here are some ways you can start improving your sleep quality tonight:

Establish a bedtime routine: Repeat the same routine each night to let your body know it is time to wind down and go to sleep. This can include activities such as showering or bathing, reading, listening to soothing music, journaling, meditating, or yoga. Do something that relaxes you and eases the transition between being awake and asleep.

Perform regular physical activity: Moderate exercise, especially aerobic exercise, is shown to be conducive to quality sleep, promoting smoother transitions between sleep cycles. Try at least 20 minutes, three times per week. Be cautious of exercising too close to bedtime as exercise for some people can be a stimulant.

Make the bedroom conducive to sleep: Bedroom use should be limited to sleep and sleep related activities. Keep computers, televisions, and other gadgets in other parts of the home, as they can offer distractions to sleep. Make the bedroom as dark, cool, and quiet a place as possible to promote the best type of sleep. Use earplugs, blackout curtains, and other devices as necessary.

Reduce stimulants: Caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine can all rev up your body and interrupt or prevent quality sleep. Cut out these substances as much as possible, especially within the evening hours.

Avoid food and limit drinking 2-3 hours before bedtime: A heavy meal or spicy foods can make lying down uncomfortable and falling asleep difficult. In addition, too much liquid right before bed can cause multiple nighttime trips to the bathroom, which interrupts sleep.

Create a Regular Sleep Schedule

Try going to sleep and waking up at the same times each day. A consistent sleep pattern reinforces your brain's natural sleep schedule and makes falling asleep much easier.

Sources:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com>

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.helpguide.org/life/sleeping.htm>

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

<http://www.newsweek.com>



Call Your Health Coach for More Information 1-800-433-2320