

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



May 2005

Sleep is essential to good health



May is Better Sleep Month. The Better Sleep Council sponsors Better Sleep Month each year to remind sleep-deprived Americans that starting each day with a good night's sleep can effectively decrease stress, reduce accidents and mistakes, and improve their quality of life.

Sleep Facts

Before the light bulb was invented, people slept an average of 10 hours each night. Today, the average American adult sleeps less than seven hours on weeknights and 7.5 hours on weekends.

The average adult requires 7-8 hours of sleep per night, but that number differs for everyone. Some people need as much as 10 hours of sleep while others require much less. If you sleep more on weekends than on weeknights, that's a sign that you probably aren't getting enough sleep during the week.

According to a survey by the National Sleep Foundation, almost seven out of ten Americans reported experiencing frequent sleep problems. These sleep-

deprived individuals are putting themselves at risk for injuries, and health and behavior problems.

The Cost of Insufficient Sleep

Sleep deprivation and sleep disorders cost an estimated \$100 billion annually in lost productivity, medical expenses, sick leave, and damage to property and the environment.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes are caused by sleepy drivers each year. These crashes result in more than 1,500 fatalities and 70,000 injuries.

Sleep and Health Problems

A growing body of scientific evidence is showing a link between insufficient sleep and disease. In fact, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and depression have all been linked to a lack of sleep.

For example, blood pressure usually falls during the normal sleep cycle. When sleep is disrupted, this normal decline is adversely affected and can lead to hypertension and cardiovascular problems. Research

has also shown that insufficient sleep impairs the body's ability to use insulin, which can lead to the onset of diabetes.

Sleep Disorders

Americans are plagued by a number of sleep disorders. Insomnia is by far the most common sleep disorder. It is characterized by difficulty falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or waking too early. In the National Sleep Foundation's survey, more than half of American adults reported experiencing symptoms of insomnia two or more nights a week.

Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder that affects 18 million Americans and is characterized by interruption in breathing during sleep. People with sleep apnea may wake frequently gasping for breath.

Restless legs syndrome is a sleep and movement disorder that affects approximately 12 million Americans. It is characterized by unpleasant feelings in the legs which cause the individual

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Tips for getting better sleep

The National Sleep Foundation suggests the following tips to help you get a good night's sleep:

1. Maintain a regular bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends.
2. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as soaking in a hot bath, reading a book, or listening to soothing music.
3. Create a sleep inducive environment that is dark, quiet, cool, comfortable and free of interruptions.
4. Sleep on a comfortable and supportive mattress and foundation. Your pillow should position your head and neck properly.
5. Remove distractions. Remove work materials, televisions, and computers from the sleep environment.
6. Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before your regular bedtime. Avoid heavy or spicy foods that can make you uncomfortable.
7. Exercise regularly. Be sure to complete your workout 2-3 hours before your bedtime because exercise can make your more alert.
8. Avoid caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, soft drinks, or chocolate) close to bedtime. It can keep you awake.
9. Avoid nicotine (e.g., cigarettes or tobacco products). Nicotine is a stimulant and can lead to poor sleep when used close to bedtime.
10. Avoid alcohol close to bedtime. Although alcohol can make you drowsy, it actually disrupts sleep.



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to move about to relieve the symptoms.

Narcolepsy is a chronic neurological disorder that affects nearly 300,000 Americans. Individuals with narcolepsy can fall asleep suddenly at any time.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, talk to your doctor. Most sleep problems and sleep disorders can be diagnosed and treated in a safe and effective way.

Sources: The National Sleep Foundation and the Better Sleep Council



Sleepy Time Word Search

See if you can find the following words in this month's hidden word puzzle:

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| APNEA | INSULIN |
| BED | NARCOLEPSY |
| BREATH | PAJAMAS |
| CAFFEINE | PILLOW |
| COLA | PRESSURE |
| DEPRIVATION | ROUTINE |
| DIABETES | SLEEP |
| DISORDER | SYNDROME |
| DOCTOR | TEA |
| EXERCISE | |
| HOURS | |
| HYPERTENSION | |
| INJURIES | |

