Manulife

Importance of Sleep

In need of a comfortable, restful night's sleep?

Quality sleep – the kind that makes you look refreshed and feeling energized – is exactly what the doctor ordered.

Homewood Health | Santé

In fact, sleep is as important to your health as diet, nutrition and exercise. The right amount and quality of sleep improves attention, behaviour, memory, and overall mental and physical health[1]; it also helps the body maintain and regulate many vital functions.

A 2015 report from the National Sleep Foundation identified that most adults need between seven to nine hours of sleep each night to function at their best during the day, and to keep their body and mind in optimal shape.[2]

Not surprising, a 2017 report found the majority of Canadians generally don't get enough sleep on a daily basis, affecting both their health and the economy as a whole. Approximately 20 percent of the country sleeps between six and seven hours every night and six percent sleep less than six hours per night.[3]

Lack of sleep has been linked to a range of negative health and, social and performance outcomes which can impact an individual's personal and professional life. Sleep deprivation costs the Canadian economy $26 billion per year, which equates to 1.35 percent of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP). Across the country, 80,000 working days are lost each year because of sleep-deprived workers.[4]

Signs that you're not getting enough sleep

Here are 10 signs that your mind and body require more sleep:

You're experiencing unexpected variances in mood. When sleep deprived, you're more susceptible to crankiness, irritability, and have greater difficulty coping with stress.

You're noticing weight gain. Sleeping fewer than six hours a night can increase the hunger-stimulating hormone, ghrelin, which makes your body crave sugary and fatty foods.[5]

You're more impulsive. When sleep deprived, you're generally less inhibited, causing you to act or speak without thinking or evaluating first.

Your reaction times are slower. When fatigued, it takes you longer to process situations, as your concentration is lowered, resulting in longer response times.

Your noticing lower levels of performance and productivity. Fatigue can negatively affect your ability to focus, reason, and even find the correct words to describe simple things.

You have little or no interest in intimacy. When tired and exhausted, many people are not in the mood nor have the energy for meaningful connection or displays of affection including sexual contact at the end of the day.

You're unable to remember things. When you're tired, you're not exerting the amount of attention required when trying to form a memory.

You're having difficulty making decisions. With chronic sleep deprivation, your brain's ability to process information, emotions and the ability to read social situations can decrease.

You get sick more often. By not getting enough sleep, your immune system is impacted, which can lower your body's ability to fight off viruses.

You're not looking your best. If you don't get enough sleep, your skin doesn't have the time to repair itself. Your skin can look older, dark under-eye circles may appear, as well as red, puffy eyes.

Steps to take to maintain healthy sleep habits

Your life may feel busy all the time, and perhaps your current sleep habits, arrangements and quality are less than ideal, but there's hope! There are many ways to improve your rest, and consciously incorporating even a few of them will likely lead to a more restful and enjoyable sleeping experience.

Create a relaxing evening ritual. Do things that relax you to create a pre-sleep routine that removes some of your daily stress. Over time, a routine may act as a signal within your brain that it's time to sleep. Use common favourites like a warm bath or massage or try other calming activities like meditating, breathing exercises or listening to soothing music as you wind down.

Stick with a routine that includes a predictable sleep schedule. Keep your meals, bedtime and morning alarm consistent, even on weekends. Maintaining sleep patterns conditions your body to expect and react accordingly to appropriate times of rest and wakefulness.

Use your bed for sleep… and sleep alone. Keep electronics, food and any other stimulating activities out of your bed. This will cue your brain to sleep – and not prepare itself for eating, reading, TV, video games, studying or chatting on the phone when you lie down.

Remove electronics from your bedroom. Screens and electronics are an integral part of our daily lives. The activities associated with them, the light they emit, and the stimulus they provide, make televisions, computers, tablets, phones and other digital items a major hindrance to sleep. Try to unplug at least an hour before bed and keep electronics out of the bedroom.

Keep your bedroom quiet, cool, and dark. Remove light and sound distraction and keep your space at a constant temperature to mimic your ideal sleeping conditions.
If needed, consider carpeting to cancel noise, installing light-blocking blinds or use an eye mask to restrict visual distractions.

Steer clear of caffeine and other stimulants. In the hours before bed, but also throughout the day, be mindful of your caffeine intake. While some people can enjoy a cup of coffee without repercussions, others may find the effects of caffeine linger well into the evening. Remember that coffee and tea aren't the only caffeine-laden beverages: many soft drinks, chocolate, common medications and herbal remedies also contain caffeine. Read the labels or speak to your pharmacist to ensure you are aware of your daily caffeine intake.

Exercise. A well-known stress-reliever is regular exercise (30-60 minutes, three times weekly). People who exercise regularly have better quality, deeper sleep[6], and are, overall, healthier. Exercise also combats obesity, a major risk factor in lack of sleep, sleep apnea, insomnia and daytime sleepiness[2]. Of course, exercise is a natural energy-booster as well, so be sure to get in that workout at least three hours before bedtime.

Limit your napping. While a quick "power nap" may work wonders for some, when there are issues with sleep, it's best to stay awake during the day. This makes it easier for your body and brain to anticipate and respond to a consistent waking and sleep routine. If you absolutely must nap, keep it short – 15 to 20 minutes in the early afternoon.

Avoid going to bed on a full – or empty – stomach. Balanced, healthy meals during the day will help keep your body and blood sugars balanced for optimal sleep. Try to keep meals scheduled and don't eat large meals right before bedtime. If you're hungry, have a light, nutritious snack (low-fat dairy or turkey) that won't sit heavily in your stomach or boost your energy. Avoid consumption of high-fat foods like chips, ice cream, or fried foods to increase the likelihood of a good quality sleep.

Sleeping is such an important part of a mindful, healthy, balanced life and most of us could use more of it, and its benefits. So, make a point of implementing some new sleep strategies, jump into those PJs and sweet dreams!

Serious health risks associated with lack of sleep

Not surprisingly, over time, a lack of adequate sleep can be associated with a shortened lifespan. Multiple studies have shown that sleeping less than five hours per night may increase mortality risk by up to 15 percent.[7]

As our lives are crowded with family, professional and other activities, many of us overlook the potential consequences, squeezing more and more into our days and nights, leaving quality rest as an afterthought. Even reducing that optimal eight hours by two or three per night can dramatically increase the odds of developing some of the following:

- Alzheimer's
- Cardiovascular disease
- Compromised immune function
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Obesity
- Susceptibility to injury

In order to live a healthy and balanced lifestyle, you need to ensure sleep is a priority. Lack of sleep can cause you to get sick mentally and physically, so be aware of the symptoms of lack of sleep, and actively work each night to ensure you keep your sleep schedule.

About 20 percent of Canadians get between six and seven hours of sleep every night. And six percent consistently get less than six hours a night.

Canada loses about 600,000 working hours every year to lack of sleep.

Adequate sleep and rest could yield an additional $12 billion to Canada's economic output.

Nearly 2/3's of adults report feeling tired "MOST OF THE TIME".

Steps to improve sleep:

- Create a relaxing evening ritual.
- Stick with a routine that includes a predictable sleep schedule.
- Use your bed for sleep… and sleep alone.
- Remove electronics from your bedroom.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, cool, and dark.
- Steer clear of caffeine and other stimulants.
- Exercise.
- Limit your napping.
- Avoid going to bed on a full or empty stomach.

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