

How Does Sleep Make Us Function Better?

We spend almost a third of our lives sleeping. While no one is really sure of the biological reason for sleep, despite decades of research, most scientists agree that sleep is critical for physiological and mental health. Some researchers hypothesize that sleep allows the brain to shut down in order to process memories; others suggest that sleep helps regulate the body's hormones.

We know that sleep deprivation adversely affects our brain, heart, and lungs as well as our metabolism and immune function. Lack of sleep also increases the risk of obesity.

What Happens When You Don't Get Enough Sleep?

Within just 24 hours of staying awake, your brain will behave as if you had a blood-alcohol level of .10 (that's above the legal limit) and your memory, ability to concentrate, hand to eye coordination, attention, and hearing will all be impaired.

At 36 hours of no sleep, your chances of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, and hormonal imbalances will be increased.

At 48 hours of sleep deprivation, you will be susceptible to microsleeps, which are involuntary mini blackouts that can last between 2 to 30 seconds.

And at 72 hours, you will likely full-on hallucinate. A simple conversation will be beyond your abilities.

How Much Sleep Do We Really Need At Different Life Stages?

As we grow, our sleep demands change. Here's what The National Sleep Foundation recommends by age.

- Newborns: 14 to 17 hours
- Infants: 12 to 15 hours
- Toddlers: 11 to 14 hours
- Preschoolers: 10 to 13 hours
- School-age children: 9 to 11 hours
- Teenagers: 9 to 11 hours
- Adults: 7 to 9 hours
- The 65+ group: 7 to 8 hours.

The Secret To A Good Night's Sleep

Here are five tips:

1. Exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day, but not too close to bedtime (a few hours give enough of a buffer).
2. Avoid caffeine late in the day and alcoholic drinks before bed.
3. Relax before bed-try a warm bath, reading, or another relaxing routine, but ideally one that doesn't require screen time.
4. Make your bedroom a sleeping den. Keep lights bright lights, sounds low, and the temperature cool (about 67 degrees).
5. Don't lie in bed awake. If you can't get to sleep, do something else, like reading, until you feel tired.

