



“Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.”

- Thomas Dekker

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World Sleep Day 2021: Regular Sleep for a Healthy Future



Friday 19th March 2021 marks the 14th annual World Sleep Day and this year's focus is on getting regular sleep for a healthy future.

According to dreams.co.uk, the average person spends 26 years of their life sleeping and an additional 7 years trying to get to sleep. This totals 33 years of our lives in bed.

But why is sleep so important?

Sleep boosts our mental and physical well-being which in turn helps to improve our immunity, weight regulation and even fertility.

Getting enough sleep is essential in helping us to maintain optimal health and it is as vital to us as regular exercise and eating a balanced diet. In fact, you could survive for three times as long without food as you could without sleep, and 17 hours without sleep produces performance impairments equivalent to two alcoholic drinks.

However, many of us fail to sleep well enough for it to truly benefit our health.

Research from The Sleep Council states that 40% of UK adults suffer with sleep problems. Further research from Bensons for Beds and the Sleep School found that lack of sleep is costing the UK economy more than £1 billion in annual revenue due to 8% of respondents calling in sick when they feel too tired to work, after a poor night's sleep. Furthermore, 22% said that poor sleep affected their ability to do their job and 12% had actually fallen asleep at their desk or during a meeting.

What happens when you fall asleep?

To get a good night's sleep, your body needs to go through phases of light, deep and REM sleep – each of which have their own important job to do in ensuring our body's function properly.

In an article by Fitbit, light sleep is described as when 'you're asleep but can be easily awoken.' Michael Grandner, MD, director of the Sleep and Health Research Program at the University of Arizona in Tucson and a Fitbit sleep consultant added "light sleep is very important because it takes up more than half of the night. It's when your body processes memories and emotions and your metabolism regulate itself. There's a lot of body maintenance occurring during lighter stages of sleep."

The same article says that 'during deep sleep, you become less responsive to outside stimuli. "Deep sleep is very much about the body," says Grandner. "The thinking parts of the brain are largely offline. Your muscles are very relaxed. You're not dreaming at all during this time. Your body is doing a lot of rebuilding and repairing." Deep sleep is when your body secretes growth hormone, which is associated with cellular rebuilding and repair.

“If deep sleep is about body, REM is about the brain,” says Grandner. “The brain is very active during REM sleep, yet the body is very inactive. It’s so inactive, you’re actively paralyzed during REM sleep.”

REM is when most dreaming happens, and your eyes move rapidly in different directions. It's very important for emotion regulation and memory as during this time, you're clearing the brain of things that aren't needed. During this phase you are also in the peak of protein synthesis which keeps many processes in the body working properly.

Sleep and Mental Health

There's a strong correlation between sleep and mental health. Regular poor sleep can have a negative impact on your mental health, while living with a mental health problem can affect your quality of sleep. The Sleep Foundation say that 'Each sleep stage plays a role in brain health, allowing activity in different parts of the brain to ramp up or down and enabling better thinking, learning and memory. Research has also uncovered that brain activity during sleep has profound effects on emotional and mental health.'

Sufficient sleep, particularly the REM phase, facilitates our brain's processing of emotional information. When we sleep, the brain works to evaluate and remember thoughts and memories. A lack of sleep is especially harmful to the consolidation of positive emotional content. In turn, this can have an impact on our mood and emotional reactivity and is tied to mental health problems and their severity.

Further information on sleep and specific mental health problems can be found here: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/mental-health>

Sleep and Physical Health

Regularly not get enough quality shut-eye is linked to a number of physical health problems.

Reduced immunity

Too little sleep can affect your body's ability to fight infections. Studies have shown that when you're sleep deprived, you are 3 times more likely to catch a cold.

Reduced heart health

Short sleep durations (less than 5 hours per night have been shown to have a negative impact on heart health, according to an analysis published in the European Heart Journal.

Sleep affects processes that keep your heart and blood vessels health, including your blood sugar, blood pressure and inflammation levels. Getting limited hours of sleep has been shown to increase risk of developing a number of heart problems.

Weight gain

According to Nyctol, sleep deprivation can increase your risk of weight gain. Sleep-deprived people have reduced levels of leptin (the chemical that makes you feel full) and increased levels of ghrelin (the hunger-stimulating hormone).

Increased risk of cancer

Though more research is needed, experts linked a lack of sleep with an increased risk in developing several types of cancer including breast cancer, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer. Sleeping problems may be a risk factor for developing certain types of cancer. They may also affect the progression of cancer and the effectiveness of treatment.

Increased risk of type 2 diabetes

Poor sleep, or too little sleep is shown to increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes and its associated health problems. By missing out on deep sleep, this could lead to type 2 diabetes by changing the way the body processes glucose, which the body uses for energy.



How can I get a better night's sleep?

Many of us will have experienced disrupted night's sleep since the Covid-19 pandemic took over our lives, and the BBC have recently reported on what some experts are calling 'coronasomnia' but what can we be doing to help our body's get the rest they need and deserve?

The World Sleep Society recommends the following 10 steps to achieve healthy sleep:

1. Have a set bedtime and wake up time. Oli Barnard, Head of Delivery at Healthy Performance says "If you keep a regular sleep schedule of going to bed and getting up at the same time each day, you will feel much more refreshed and energised. If you're getting enough sleep, you should wake up naturally without an alarm."
2. If you are in the habit of taking a nap, do not exceed 45 minutes of daytime sleep.
3. Avoid excessive alcohol ingestion 4 hours before bedtime and do not smoke.
4. Avoid caffeine 6 hours before bedtime. This includes coffee, tea and many sodas, as well as chocolate.
5. Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4 hours before bedtime. A light snack before bed is acceptable.
6. Exercise regularly, but not right before bed.
7. Use comfortable bedding.
8. Find a comfortable temperature setting for sleeping and keep the room well ventilated.
9. Block out all distracting noise and eliminate as much light as possible.
10. Reserve the bed for sleep and sex. Don't use the bed as an office, workroom, or recreation room.

On top of these 10 tips, Oli also advises "A peaceful bedtime routine tells your brain that it's time to wind down and let go of the day's stresses. Avoid the use of electronic devices that emit 'blue light' as they trick the brain to think it's not time for bed. If all else fails, get up. If you can't fall asleep within 15-20 minutes go into another room and do something non-stimulating. Listen to calming music, do some breathing exercises and only return to bed when you feel sleepy."



Fact of the month

The longest time someone has managed to stay awake for is 11 days and 25 minutes. A record that was set by 17-year-old Randy Gardner in 1964.



Tip of the month

Avoid exposure to blue-light emitting electronic devices 2-3 hours before bedtime to reduce sleep interference. Alternatively, see if you can switch your device to 'night mode' to reduce the emission of blue light.



Nutrition and Hydration Week 2021: Has Covid-19 affected the way we're eating and drinking?

Nutrition and hydration week usually takes place annually in March but this year, due to the pandemic, the campaign has unfortunately been pushed back until June. However, with many individuals losing motivation to take care of themselves, we feel that it is still an important topic to cover.

Since the first lockdown began back in March 2020, we've all spent a lot more time at home, allowing for more time to focus on our nutrition. Without the temptation of cake in the office or an after-work pint surely as a nation we've all become healthier during this past year, right? Wrong.

Quarantine, lockdown restrictions and supermarket panic buyers have all had an impact on our normal food habits.

Imperial College London recently released a report on 'Food and coronavirus' and noted that 'foods with longer shelf lives appear to be an adaptive change in food choice...Tinning and curing often coincides with higher amounts of salt or sugar in the final products, which can impact weight and blood pressure...On a positive note, many companies have reformulated their products to reduce both salt and sugar content which may give customers the best of both worlds.'

They also found that with a large proportion of the population working from home, on furlough, unable to work or shielding, snacking behaviours are expected to rise, adding to fat, salt and sugar intake.

Although these foods are fine to be eaten in moderation as part of a healthy diet, higher than normal intake over an extended period of time, combined with reduced activity can contribute to undesirable weight gain.

Poor mental health impacts our food choices

Our mental health can have a huge impact on the way we eat and drink and with many of us experiencing additional anxieties and stresses, it's no surprise that that has impacted our interest in food. For some, this could be a loss of appetite, while for others an increase in stress – or comfort-eating may be seen.

Alcohol consumption was also expected to rise in this environment, further affecting psychological wellbeing and contributing to increased risk of weight gain.

An article published by alcoholchange.org in November 2020 shows that almost one in three drinkers (29%) have been drinking at increasing or high risk levels over the previous 6 months while anxiety, stress, or worry were the most common reasons given for drinking, with four in ten (41%) drinkers reporting this as a reason for drinking at least once in the past six months.

So how can we improve our eating habits?

First of all, when you don't have a plan it's easy to aimlessly wander around the kitchen trying to decide what to cook, only to end up snacking or ordering a takeout instead.

Plan your meals

Take some time to find some healthy but easy recipes and plan what you will eat for dinner every day. Depending on how many you are cooking for, you can double up on the servings so that each family member also has some for lunch the following day.

When creating your shopping list, ensure that you have a good selection of fruits, vegetables, meat (or meat alternatives) and non-perishable items such as pasta, rice and pulses. This gives you the base to be able to create almost any basic yet healthy meal.

Don't be restrictive

There's no such thing as good foods and bad foods. All food is good when enjoyed in moderation. So when you decide to improve your diet, there's no need to cut out the 'junk'.

By completely cutting out the foods that you enjoy (such as chocolate, crisps etc) you can start to build up a bad relationship with food leading to binge-eating or other eating disorders. If you can't go without your daily chocolate bar, continue to have it, but just make sure that the rest of your food intake is based around nutritionally dense foods.

Drink more water

Although each of us have different hydration requirements, the general rule of thumb is to drink around 2L per day. This doesn't have to be just plain water as milk and sugar-free drinks also count.

By increasing your fluid intake, if you aren't already drinking enough, you may also experience decreased levels of hunger and a small amount of weight loss. Since water is naturally calorie-free, it is generally linked with reduced calorie intake.

This is mainly because you then drink water instead of other beverages, which are often high in calories and sugar. Observational studies have shown that people who drink mostly water have up to a 9% (or 200 calories) lower calorie intake, on average.

Start small

If you have acknowledged that your current diet may need a complete overhaul, start small and don't change everything at once. You could find this quite overwhelming and difficult to stick to. Initially aim to just increase your vegetable intake. Then work on reducing the amount of processed foods – see it as a lifestyle change and something to continuously work on rather than just a diet.

For more nutritional information, please visit our [Take5](#) resource library for free, downloadable videos, podcasts and PDF's.

Reduce your alcohol intake

Alcohol is commonly linked with poor food choices, and although we can't stumble into a kebab shop on the way home from a night out right now, you may still find yourself ordering a takeaway (that you probably don't need) after a few drinks.

Ensure that you stick to, or below, the guidelines of 14 units per week and if you are currently drinking more than this, you should work on reducing your intake and maintaining at least 3 alcohol-free days per week.