

Tuning up Health Starts with Good Sleep Habits

By Dr. Kjartan Armann

In this modern world it appears that good sleep hygiene has become a casualty. It is estimated that 70 million American adults suffer from chronic sleep problems. Adults are getting about 10% less sleep than the previous generation and 60 to 90 minutes less than what is desirable for good health. A significant number of our children also are suffering from the lack of appropriate amount of quality sleep. Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Newborns need 16-18 hours, preschoolers 11-12 hours, school-age children at least 10 hours, and teens need 9-10 hours. A significant number of adults and teenagers are averaging less the 7 hours of sleep per night. Improved sleep time is not a luxury but a necessity for overall quality of life. Think of it as a vital sign to good health. Your doctor should be asking at each visit "How is your sleep?" With the never ending connection to electronics such as computers, cell phones, TV, tablets to name a few we are a sleep-deprived society that is exhausted, due to the need for constant connection with the world as we know it.



abnormal laboratory results. For example: We are at risk for high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol. Sleep deprivation is a form of CSL and research as shown it also is associated with mental illness, poor quality of life/well-being, loss of work time and increased health costs. CSL is associated with increased heart disease, including heart attacks. So getting enough sleep helps prevent chronic diseases and promotes overall good health.

Sleep deprived drivers are responsible for a large number of vehicle and machinery-related injuries every year. Some studies have shown that these drivers are more dangerous than drunk drivers.

Myth: Sleep time is when your body and brain shut down. Fact sleep is a complex time of activity for our bodies. Sleep is divided into two basic types: rapid eye movement (REM) and non-REM. Our first REM sleep is usually 60-90 minutes after we fall asleep. It is in REM sleep that we dream. Our arm and leg muscles are temporarily paralyzed during this time; this is thought to keep us from acting out on our dreams. Non-REM sleep has three different stages. During sleep we go in and

In this country we under estimate the importance of quality sleep and chronic health conditions. Chronic sleep loss (CSL) has a cumulative effect on our health, emotional, and physical well being. For example, CSL exacerbates depression, obesity, diabetes and other chronic disease states. Research on CSL has shown a strong link to

out of these stages multiple times. During the three stages of non-REM sleep our bodies and brains go through multiple changes that help us rejuvenate and get ready for the upcoming days activities. Stage 3 non-REM sleep is when we are in our very deepest sleep and when it is the most difficult to be woken up. This is considered to be our restorative stage which is necessary for feeling well rested the next day. It is also the stage of sleep where children will wet the bed or sleep walk.



Sleep hygiene is the promotion of good regular sleep. It should start with the sleep environment; you should be looking forward to an inviting bedroom to sleep in. The room should be free of ALL electronics including TV, computers, and cell phones. It needs to be an inviting, soothing and comfortable environment that is quiet and dark. The bed should be comfortable and used only for sleep and intimate activities. Refrain from smoking 4 hours prior to bed time. Smoking causes among other things hypoxia, which makes it difficult to fall asleep. Best for your health is just quit smoking. When alcohol is consumed within 4 hours of going to bed it causes us to wake up 2-4 hours after we go to sleep. Limit or stop consuming caffeine 6 hours prior to sleep, some people should avoid caffeine even as early as the late afternoon. Keep a regular sleep schedule, go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. Avoid large meals just before bed and don't go to bed hungry. A cool room temperature is better for sleep, but not too cold. The ideal room temperature is 60-67 degrees. Fact: Cold feet while you are sleeping have been associated with poor sleep. The solution is to wear socks to bed. Avoid stimulating activities such as a vigorous

workout within 2 hours of bed time. This increases the body temperature which will hinder your ability to fall asleep. It is important to exercise everyday for at least 30 minutes preferably longer. Exercise helps relieve stress, increases blood flow to all parts of your body, promotes improved immune function and promote relaxation by relieving stress.

Other things to do that will help with good sleep hygiene are as follows:

1. Get a massage from someone who you trust.

2. Limit day time naps to just 20-45 minutes.
3. Relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, acupuncture (yes this does relax you)
4. Drink herbal teas (no caffeine!) There are many teas that may help with relaxation, they taste good, and drinking something warm just prior to sleep helps relax the body. Mother was right when she said have a glass of warm milk prior to bedtime.
5. Listen to music that is soothing and relaxing.

Snoring is a major indicator of obstructive sleep apnea, which can be a major health hazard. If your snoring is loud and every night or you think you suffer from CSL consult your physician.

Tuning up your health must start with good sleep habits and hygiene. Getting an adequate amount of sleep will make you feel good, alert and improve your disposition. Critical to our good health is a good night's sleep not only do we feel better, but we are healthier! Our immune system works better which means we are less prone to diseases and infections. We are able to fight off chronic disease states better. We are intellectually more intact and have sharper thinking skills throughout the day. So let us eat right, get physical exercise and sleep well to preserve our health.