



CONCERN:EAP

Healthy & Resilient You



Why sleep?

Sleep is a major measure of health and a critical biological function. Lost sleep accumulates progressively over time and can significantly alter your health, productivity, mood, and even your safety. Without adequate sleep, your mind and body will break down.



The amount of sleep you get (or don't get) directly affects:

- ✓ Attention and ability to focus
- ✓ Threshold for stress
- ✓ Hormone regulation
- ✓ Daytime drowsiness
- ✓ Low-grade inflammation including heart disease
- ✓ Body fat
- ✓ Diabetes

Fact vs. fiction: Sleep debt

Most people think sleep is a lot like a bank account with a minimum balance penalty. You can short the account a few days a month as long as you replenish it with fresh funds before the penalty kicks in. This understanding, known colloquially as “paying off your sleep debt,” has held sway over sleep research for the last few decades, and has served as a comfortable context for popular media to discuss sleep with weary-eyed readers and listeners.

Studies have shown that “catch-up sleep” helps us pay off some, but by no means all of our sleep debt. It's best to keep your sleep-deprived nights to a minimum. Just because you slept in Saturday and Sunday doesn't mean you'll be sharp Monday morning. The key to keeping your sleep balance debt free is to know what you need and practice good sleep hygiene.



Resilience tip:

Keep a log of your sleep patterns, including naps. Try to make a note of what you did before going to sleep and how you felt in the morning.



Your sleep needs

Just like Goldilocks picking out a bed, you may be wondering what is too much sleep, too little sleep, and just the right amount of sleep...you're not alone!

- **Too much:** How can too much sleep be a bad thing? It's true. Oversleeping is actually a medical disorder. The condition causes people to suffer from extreme sleepiness throughout the day. Symptoms of anxiety, low energy, and memory problems can result from the constant need for sleep.
- **Too little:** Many people who are sleeping only 5 or 6 hours a night think that they get enough sleep. Most people who claim to be short sleepers are really just chronically sleep deprived and will often medicate themselves with caffeine during the day to stay awake.
- **Just right:** Most healthy, middle-aged adults need about 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. Over 10 hours is an indication of an undiagnosed sleep problem or some other medical or psychiatric issue that is fragmenting sleep.



Resilient tip: No matter how busy you are, try to wake up at the same time every day. Try to extend (or shorten if you're sleeping more than 9 hours a day) your nightly sleep by fifteen minutes or half an hour a week until you no longer feel compelled to sleep in during the weekend.



Resilient tip: Kick the habits: No more caffeine and tobacco after lunch and no alcohol 4-6 hours before bed (even on weekends!).



Sources:

American Academy of Sleep Medicine Educational Outreach www.sleepeducation.com
National Sleep Foundation www.sleepfoundation.org
Stanford University Educational Outreach www.end-your-sleep-deprivation.com

Sleep hygiene

Routinely sleep depriving yourself during the week and trying to "catch up" on the weekends simply doesn't work. Our daytime behaviors have a direct impact on our ability to sleep.

Pay careful attention to your mood, energy and health. You should notice a marked improvement as your sleep debt is reduced.

- **Consistency:** A good sleep schedule is critical, but simple:
 - Go to bed at the same time every night no matter what you are missing out on!
 - Wake up at the same time every day even if you don't "have to."
 - **Avoid stressful / stimulating situations before bed:** Don't pay bills or have intense conversations before bed. If you awaken during the night thinking about your task list, keep a pen and pad at your bedside. You can often stifle disruptive thoughts by writing them down.
 - **Create a bedtime ritual:** Going to bed should be a positive experience, not a punishment. Establish a bedtime routine that helps you relax and begin winding down from your day. This will help ease the transition between wakefulness and sleepiness. Consistency is important, so don't set up something too ambitious that is not sustainable. A relaxing bedtime ritual may include a warm bath or shower, quiet meditation, reading or listening to soothing music.
- Try to make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, cool and well ventilated. A comfortable mattress can further improve your sleep quality.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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