



Live Healthy Georgia

Seniors Taking Charge

Healthy Sleep

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A common question that arises throughout a person's life is "How much sleep do I [or a family member] need?" Most people know when they have not gotten enough sleep – drowsiness, irritability, lack of concentration, and general lack of energy can all result from getting less than enough zzz's. In our busy world of work, school, volunteering, and caretaking, it sometimes seems impossible to get enough sleep. So, what are our sleep needs, and how can we get enough?

Your Sleep Needs

Everyone has their own unique "basal sleep need" that is determined by their genes. This amount is what you need regularly in order to perform at your optimum level. Researchers agree that for most adults, 7-9 hours per night is necessary to feel alert and ready to go the next day. However, a 2005 study by the National Sleep Foundation found that Americans get on average 6.9 hours of sleep per night. Therefore, most people have accumulated a "sleep debt" – all of the minutes less than optimal amount of sleep not enjoyed. It is important to note that shorter sleep duration has been associated with increased risk of:

- Motor vehicle accidents
- Obesity
- Diabetes and heart problems
- Depression and/or memory problems

Changing Sleep Needs

Age	Average Sleep Needs
3 - 5	11 – 13 hours
5 – 12	10 – 11 hours
12 – 17	8.5 – 9.5 hours
Adults	7 – 9 hours

Too much sleep is also associated with increased risk of illnesses or accidents, but these findings may be associated with factors other than duration of sleep. It is also interesting to note that a person's circadian rhythms, or sleep/wake cycles, differ throughout the lifespan. Adolescents tend to be more alert in the evening hours and therefore have difficulty going to bed early enough to get enough sleep for the first school bell the next morning. Older adults tend to be lighter sleepers (awakening easily and experiencing shorter duration of "deep sleep") and therefore tend to need more daytime naps.



Naps aren't just for kids and kittens!

Are you getting enough sleep? To find out, ask yourself the following questions.

- How do you feel on different amounts of sleep?
- Are you productive, healthy, and happy on your usual amount of sleep?
- Do you have any health issues affecting your duration or quality of sleep?
- Are you at risk for diseases?
- Are you experiencing sleep problems?
- Do you rely on caffeine to get you through the day?
- Do you feel sleepy while driving?

Healthy Sleep to Do List

1. Keep your sleep routine constant – as tempting as it is to sleep in on the weekends, try to keep your alarm set at the same time and go to bed at the same time.
2. Have a “bed-time” routine – about an hour before you turn in, take a relaxing bath or shower, listen to music, or try yoga or tai chi for relaxation.
3. Create a “sleep-promoting environment” – make sure your room is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.
4. Use the bedroom only for sleep and sex – no t.v., internet-surfing, or reading in bed.
5. Finish eating at least 2 – 3 hours before bed.
6. Exercise regularly.
7. Avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime, and stop smoking.

What Is Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea is a chronic condition that results in periods of interrupted breathing (often pauses that occur 5 – 30 times per hour). These pauses interfere with sleep, causing disturbances that lead to waking during the night or increased fatigue despite “adequate sleep duration.” This condition increases the risk of obesity, hypertension, stroke, heart attack, and having a work-related or driving-related accident. Treatment is possible and may include making lifestyle changes, surgery, or using mouthpieces.

If you feel tired, even after “getting enough sleep,” talk to your doctor about the possibility of having sleep apnea. Also, talk to your doctor if you have insomnia, leg cramps or tingling, snoring, or difficulty breathing (or if your sleeping partner notices any of these symptoms), as they may indicate a more serious health condition.

March Events

- [National Nutrition Month](#)
- [Save Your Vision Month](#)
- [National Sleep Awareness Week](#) (5 – 11)
- [World Kidney Day](#) (8)
- [Brain Awareness Week](#) (12 – 18)
- [American Diabetes Alert Day](#) (27)

References:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. What is sleep apnea? Available at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sleepapnea/> (accessed February 6, 2012)
National Sleep Foundation. How much sleep do we really need? Available at <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/how-sleep-works/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need> (accessed February 6, 2012)
Thompson EG. WebMD: How can you sleep better? Available at <http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/how-to-set-up-a-healthy-sleep-environment#> (accessed February 6, 2012)

Pictures:

<http://sleepapneadisorder.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Excessive-Daytime-Sleepiness.jpg>;
<http://coffeeandtequila.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/catnapping.jpg>