

How Did You Sleep Last Night?

Sleep Apnea, Insomnia, and the Important Benefits of REM Sleep

In today's fast-paced world, one of the most under-rated health practices is getting adequate, proper rest. And "burning the midnight oil"—whether you're working late, raising a family or cramming for exams—is not the only thing that prevents you from getting the deep, restful sleep your body and mind need.

Young adults with active work and social lives are also at high risk for sleep deprivation. Though, many factors outside the demands of a busy life can affect your sleep patterns. About half of all people over 65 have frequent sleeping problems, such as insomnia or sleep apnea, and deep sleep stages in many elderly people sometimes become minimal or even non-existent.

How much sleep each of us needs depends on several factors, including age. For adults of all ages, 7 to 8 hours a night is widely considered the best amount of sleep, and it increases if you have already been deprived of sleep in previous nights. When you haven't slept enough (even if you are accustomed to a sleep-depriving schedule), your judgment, reaction time and other functions are still impaired.

In fact, driving experts say that sleep deprivation is a leading cause of traffic accidents, while most fitness trainers typically include sleep as one of the central components of a comprehensive physical training program.

Better, Deeper Sleep

Besides helping with workout recovery and boosting alertness, sleep—particularly rapid eye movement (REM) sleep—helps your brain store new information into long-term memory by replenishing the components of your brain that control memory, alertness and problem solving. Generally speaking, REM is the most restorative component of your sleeping time.

While, insomnia can come from many sources, including stress, environment and medical conditions, setting yourself up for a good night's sleep is a critical part of a generally healthy lifestyle. Sleep apnea is also a common condition, causing your breathing patterns to abruptly awaken you frequently during the night, which diminishes the depth and quality of your sleep. A leading cause of daytime sleepiness, apnea often goes undiagnosed, because it is difficult for your doctor to detect the condition during routine office visits.

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