

# Sleep

## The Importance of Sleep

Sleep isn't exactly a time when your body and brain shut off. While you rest, your brain stays busy, overseeing a wide variety of biological maintenance that keeps your body running in top condition, preparing you for the day ahead. Without enough hours of restorative sleep, you won't be able to work, learn, create, and communicate at a level even close to your true potential. Regularly skimp on "service" and you're headed for a major mental and physical breakdown. The good news is that you don't have to choose between health and productivity. As you start getting the sleep you need, your energy and efficiency will go up. In fact, you're likely to find that you actually get more done during the day than when you were skimping on shuteye. Lack of sleep and sleep disorders can do much more than make you tired. They are connected to an inability to lose weight and can even affect your heart.

## How Much Sleep is Necessary?

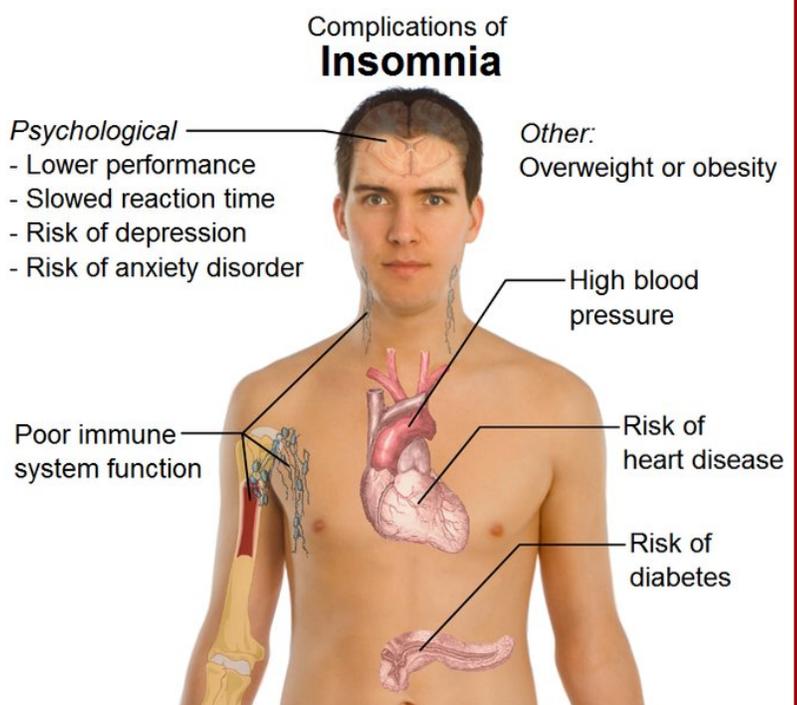
Studies have found that most people need six to eight hours each day and that too little or too much can increase the risk of cardiovascular problems. There is a big difference between the amount of sleep you can get by on and the amount you need to function optimally. The best way to figure out if you're meeting your sleep needs is to evaluate how you feel as you go about your day. If you're logging enough hours, you'll feel energetic and alert all day long, from the moment you wake up until your regular bedtime.

## Effects of Too Little Sleep

While it may seem like losing sleep isn't such a big deal, sleep deprivation has a wide range of negative effects that go way beyond daytime drowsiness. Lack of sleep affects your judgment, coordination, and reaction times.

### The effects include:

- Fatigue, lethargy, and lack of motivation
- Moodiness and irritability
- Reduced creativity and problem-solving skills
- Inability to cope with stress
- Reduced immunity; frequent colds and infections
- Concentration and memory problems
- Weight gain
- Impaired motor skills and increased risk of accidents
- Difficulty making decisions
- Increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, and other health problems



## **Sleep, continued**

### **Signs and Symptoms of Lack of Sleep**

How is it possible to be sleep deprived without knowing it? Most of the signs of sleep deprivation are much more subtle than falling face first into your dinner plate. Furthermore, if you've made a habit of skimping on sleep, you may not even remember what it feels like to be wide-awake, fully alert, and firing on all cylinders. Maybe it feels normal to get sleepy when you're in a boring meeting, struggling through the afternoon slump, or dozing off after dinner, but the truth is that it's only "normal" if you're sleep deprived. You may be sleep deprived if you...

- Need an alarm clock in order to wake up on time
- Rely on the snooze button
- Have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning
- Feel sluggish in the afternoon
- Get sleepy in meetings, lectures, or warm rooms
- Get drowsy after heavy meals or when driving
- Need to nap to get through the day
- Fall asleep while watching TV or relaxing in the evening
- Feel the need to sleep in on weekends
- Fall asleep within five minutes of going to bed

### **How Do I Get a Good Night's Sleep?**

If you're struggling to get a good night's sleep follow some of these suggestions:

- Get regular physical activity, but don't do it right before bed because that gets your adrenaline pumping and can keep you awake.
- Limit alcohol consumption to one drink per day for women and two drinks for men; too much alcohol interferes with sleep.
- Avoid caffeine before bed.
- Develop a pre-bedtime routine such as taking a warm bath, dimming the lights or having some herbal tea.