Why sleep is essential for health

Last reviewed Fri 31 May 2019

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Getting enough sleep is essential for helping a person maintain optimal health and well-being. When it comes to their health, sleep is as vital as regular exercise and eating a balanced diet.
Modern-day living in the United States and many other countries does not always embrace the necessity for adequate sleep. Yet, it is important that people make an effort to get enough sleep regularly.

The following are some of the many benefits health professionals associate with getting a good night's rest.

1. Better productivity and concentration

There were several studies that scientists did in the early 2000s, that looked at the effects of sleep deprivation.

What the researchers concluded is that sleep has links to several brain functions, including:

- concentration

- productivity

- cognition

A more recent 2015 study in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* showed that children's sleep patterns can have a direct impact on their behavior and academic performance.

2. Lower weight gain risk

The link between weight gain and obesity and short sleep patterns is not completely clear.

There have been several studies throughout the years that have linked obesity and poor sleep patterns.

However, a more recent study in the journal *Sleep Medicine* concludes that there is no link between being overweight and sleep deprivation.

This research argues that many previous studies fail to account adequately for other factors, such as:

- drinking alcohol

- living with type 2 diabetes

- level of physical activity

- education levels

- long working hours

- long sedentary time

A lack of sleep may affect a person's desire or ability to maintain a healthful lifestyle, but it may or may not be a direct contributor to weight gain.

3. Better calorie regulation

Similarly to gaining weight, there is evidence to suggest that getting a good night's sleep can help a person consume fewer calories during the day.

For example, one study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America says that sleep patterns affect the hormones responsible for appetite.

When a person does not sleep long enough, it can interfere with their body's ability to regulate food intake correctly.
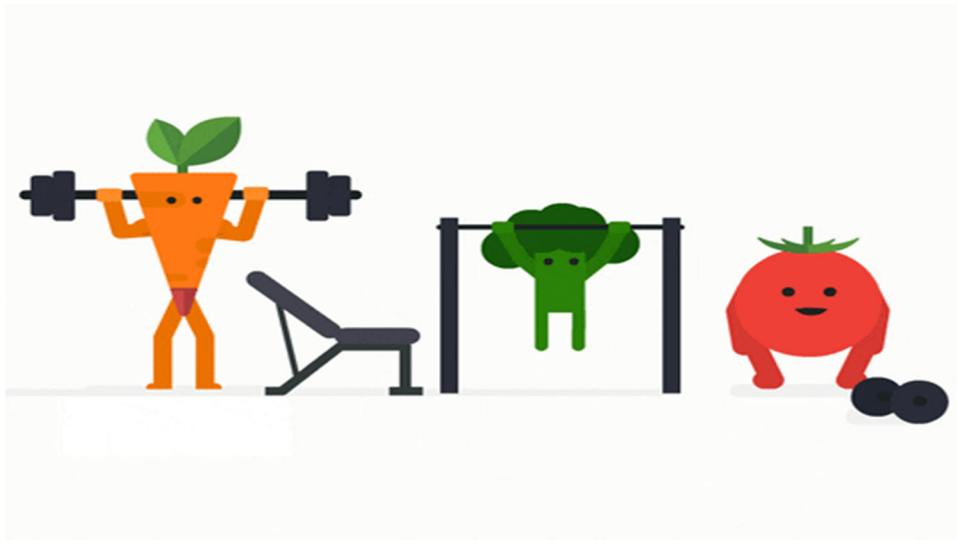
4. Greater athletic performance

According to the National Sleep Foundation, adequate sleep for adults is between 7 and 9 hours a night, and athletes may benefit from as many as 10 hours. Accordingly, sleep is as important to athletes as consuming enough calories and nutrients.

One of the reasons for this requirement is that the body heals during sleep. Other benefits include:

- better performance intensity
- more energy
- better coordination
- faster speed
- Better mental function

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5. Lower risk of heart disease

One risk factor for heart disease is high blood pressure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), getting adequate rest each night allows the body's blood pressure to regulate itself.

Doing so can reduce the chances of sleep-related conditions such as apnea and promote better overall heart health.

6. More social and emotional intelligence

Sleep has links to people's emotional and social intelligence. Someone who does not get adequate sleep is more likely to have issues with recognizing other people's emotions and expressions.

For example, one study in the *Journal of Sleep Research* looked at people's responses to emotional stimuli. The researchers concluded, similarly to many earlier studies, that a person's emotional empathy is less when they do not get adequate sleep.

7. Preventing depression

The association between sleep and mental health has been the subject of research for a long time. One conclusion is that there is a link between lack of sleep and depression.

A study appearing in *JAMA Psychiatry* examines patterns of death by suicide over 10 years. It concludes that lack of sleep is a contributing factor to many of these deaths.

Another study in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* suggests that people with sleep disorders such as insomnia are likely to show signs of depression.

8. Lower inflammation

There is a link between getting adequate sleep and reducing inflammation in the body.

For example, a study in the *World Journal of Gastroenterology* suggests a link between sleep deprivation and inflammatory bowel diseases that affect people's gastrointestinal tract.

The study showed that sleep deprivation can contribute to these diseases — and that these diseases, in turn, can contribute to sleep deprivation.

9. Stronger immune system

Sleep helps the body repair, regenerate, and recover. The immune system is no exception to this relationship. Some research shows how better sleep quality can help the body fight off infection.

However, scientists still need to do further research into the exact mechanisms of sleep in regards to its impact on the body's immune system.

Sleep Recommendations: Sleep needs vary from person to person, depending on their age. As a person ages, they typically require less sleep to function properly.

According to the CDC, the breakdown is as follows:

- **Newborns (0–3 months):** 14–17 hours

- **Infants (4–12 months):** 12–16 hours

- **Toddler (1–2 years):** 11–14 hours

- **Preschool (3–5 years):** 10–13 hours

- **School age (6–12 years):** 9–12 hours

- **Teen (13–18 years):** 8–10 hours

- **Adult (18–60 years):** 7-plus hours

- **Adult (61–64 years):** 7–9 hours

- **Adult (65+ years):** 7–8 hours

As well as the number of hours, the quality of sleep is also important. Signs of poor sleep quality include:

- Waking in the middle of the night.

- Still not feeling rested after an adequate number of hours sleep.

Some things a person can do to improve sleep quality are:

- Avoiding sleeping in when you have had enough sleep.

- Going to bed around the same time each night.

- Spending more time outside and being more active during the day.

- Reducing stress through exercise, therapy, or other means.

Summary

Sleep is a vital, often neglected, component of every person's overall health and well-being. Sleep is important because it enables the body to repair and be fit and ready for another day.

Getting adequate rest may also help prevent excess weight gain, heart disease, and increased illness duration.

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