

ARCH

Psychological Services

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THE ARCH GUIDE TO GOOD SLEEP

Most people are chronically tired and sleep-deprived. An ingenious experiment showed clearly that even one extra hour of sleep can have profound effects on our ability to function well. A psychologist (and famous dog trainer) from British Columbia accessed Canadian car accident data from two important Monday mornings: after the semi-annual time changes (“spring ahead” and “fall back”). Car accidents were much *more* common after losing an hour of sleep the weekend before and much *less* common after gaining just one hour of sleep the weekend before. Imagine – just one hour’s difference incurred a notable cost (or savings) in vehicle damage and lives!

Also, sleep deprivation is cumulative. This "sleep debt" increases over time, causing our performance to suffer and us feeling more sleepy with each succeeding day of insufficient sleep. Look for some of the following signs that your sleep is insufficient either in quantity or quality:

- Don't wake up spontaneously in the morning, but must be awakened, sometimes with great difficulty. Some say even needing an alarm clock is a sign of trouble!
- Often have a rushed or missed breakfast because you oversleep frequently.
- Appear sleepy during the day.
- You or others note that you are having trouble concentrating on work or finishing tasks.
- Feel irritable, particularly late in the day. This may also be reflected in conflict with others or hassles in completing tasks
- Fall asleep after coming home from work.
- Sleep much longer and later on weekends than during the week (repaying an accumulated "sleep debt").

It's much easier to prevent a sleep problem than to treat one, so here are some tips to help establish life-long patterns of good sleep:

- Set a regular bed time and stick to it.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, typically around 30 minutes, such as taking a warm bath or reading.
- Make after dinner a relaxing time. Too much activity close to bedtime can keep you awake.
- Avoid big meals close to bedtime, especially after 8 p.m.
- Avoid caffeinated products less than six hours before bedtime.
- Set a comfortable bedroom temperature – not too warm or cold.

- Keep the bedroom dark. If necessary, use a small nightlight. Expose yourself to natural sunlight soon after awakening in the morning (or, in the middle of winter, the closest thing you can get! Even a picture of a sunny day might help.)
- Keep the noise level low.
- Visit the washroom before you settle down for sleep. Avoid liquids after 8 p.m. if you find yourself waking up to pee.
- Avoid naps during the day.
- Exercise can promote good sleep, but not within three hours of bedtime.
- Avoid emotional conversations, watching TV that is exciting or scary, or playing electronic games before bedtime.
- Keep the TV and arguments out of your bedroom. Sleeping and sex only!
- Talk with your physician about medications that may affect your sleep. Ask for melatonin, if necessary. Most sleep aids only buy you a half an hour and many have unwanted side effects. Fewer, these days, have the potential for addiction. However, relying on these means you won't learn how to sleep well on your own.
- Keep a sleep diary to record how much time you slept the night before and how you feel the next day. After one week, review the diary and look for potential influences on the quality and quantity of your sleep, such as watching TV, drinking something caffeinated or arguing before bed.
- Practice progressive muscle relaxation (click on "Resources"). Over time, you will condition your body to enter a relaxed state on cue. Helps manage stress, too!

The American National Center on Sleep Disorders Research has an online resource that includes the Sleep Top 100 songs, movies, lullabies, and books, how to access professional assessment, and more tips and facts about sleep.

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

For any questions about this information, please contact us. We offer a range of wellness initiatives, along with therapy and assessment.