



ZZZZZZ.....Got Sleep?

We have all heard it...“You spend about 1/3 of your life in bed.” While we may spend 1/3 of our lives in our bedrooms, most people do not sleep for eight hours, and the little sleep they get is not restorative. Sleep-related problems affect an estimated 50 to 70 million Americans of all ages and socioeconomic classes.

Why We Need Sleep

Sleep replenishes the body on all levels: cellular, endocrine, immune, metabolic, physical and emotional. It repairs and restores major organs and brain chemicals. Physiologic studies suggest that a sleep deficit may put the body into a state of high alert, increasing the production of stress hormones and driving up blood pressure.

In the absence of a good night’s sleep, the body and brain begin a slow deterioration affecting all areas of health and function. Although the body can survive for a month or more without food, death can occur in a week without sleep. Three nights without restorative sleep can produce a state known as “sleep deprived psychosis,” in which rational thinking is impossible.

During restorative sleep, the brain and body produce serotonin, a chemical necessary for mood stabilization, coping, attention and memory. The less serotonin available, the less able one is to deal even with the most mundane day-to-day tasks. Picky kids get pickier, cranky kids get crankier. Poor sleepers tend to be poor students as well.

What Causes Sleep Problems?

Everyone is aware that caffeine-containing foods like coffee and chocolate can interfere with sleep. Also be sure that kids are not eating foods and drinking beverages containing other excitotoxins, like MSG and aspartame. Diet sodas and MSG-laced soup and Chinese food can keep them awake. Sleep disturbances are sometimes associated with allergies, especially to dust, molds and other critters. Some kids’ reactions to foods, such as citrus fruits, can cause bed-wetting, which interrupts their sleep.

Sleep difficulties may signal sensory regulatory issues. Physical therapist Debra Dickson and occupational therapist Anne Buckley-Reen believe this is common. They conceived a sleep hygiene program called SANE. The SANE approach facilitates change through restorative Sleep, Activities to reduce stress, balanced Nutrition, and nurturing Environments. To learn more about SANE, attend one of their workshops. (See Upcoming Events.)

What Sleep Deprivation Looks Like

Sleep-deprived people have elevated blood levels of substances associated with inflammation. People who sleep less than seven hours a night are also significantly more likely to be obese. Many kids get only “junk sleep” because they are sleeping surrounded by gadgets like cell phones, DVD players, computers, iPods, and TVs giving off high levels of electromagnetic fields (EMFs).

EMFs disturb brain waves, heart rate variability, breathing patterns and bowel movements. Everyone is 100 times more vulnerable to EMFs when asleep, because EMFs decrease pineal function, causing it to stop producing protective melatonin. The older the teens, the more gadgets they have in their bedrooms. Most high school seniors have about four. At 3:00 am, they may be instant messaging, playing video games, or watching a movie.

Kids who are sleep deprived can exhibit

- explosive tempers
- easily hurt feelings
- impatience and poor impulse control
- clumsiness and accidents
- frenzied play
- trouble focusing and paying attention in class
- forgetfulness and making silly mistakes
- excessive talking

Many of these symptoms are similar to those of ADD. One study found that when a group of kids diagnosed with ADD were permitted to catch up on their sleep that a majority no longer qualified for the diagnosis!

How Much Sleep is Enough?

According to WebMD, children have the following sleep needs:

- 1-3 years old: 12 - 14 hours
- 3-6 years old: 10 ¾ - 12 hours
- 7-12 years old: 10 - 11 hours
- 12-18 years old: 8 ¼ - 9 ½ hours

Only about 20% of American teens get the recommended nine hours of sleep a night, half sleep less than eight hours on school nights, and 28% fall asleep in school at least once a week. Sleep patterns change with age, and after puberty teenagers find it physiologically more difficult to go to sleep early. When school districts addressed this problem by starting their classes an hour later, absenteeism and grades improved, disciplinary problems decreased, and students and teachers were more productive.

What You Can Do to Improve Sleep Habits

Start early! For young children, begin a bedtime ritual that includes time away from electronic gadgets at least an hour before bed. For older kids and adults, make sure bedrooms are cool, calm, quiet, dark “media-free zones” used exclusively for quiet time and sleeping.

Create a Safe, Healthy Bedroom

- Avoid loud patterns and/or bright colors on the walls and in furniture design. Many children’s rooms are too active, with beds shaped like race cars and busy posters, colors and patterns on the walls and in the rugs
- Use organic paints, carpet, curtains, mattresses and bedding to limit out-gassing and static electricity which disturbs the body’s electrical system
- Make the space as dark as possible
- Avoid metal bed frames
- Never use an electric blanket
- No metal springs and no flame retardants in mattresses
- No large electronic devices on the other side of the wall behind the headboard
- No cell phones or cell phone chargers in any bedrooms
- Replace any 2.2 and above gigahertz cordless phone with a corded phone

Sweet dreams.