

Healthy Living

Tips to ensure a better night's sleep

A state of sleep is necessary to give the body and mind time to recharge and prepare for the next day. Though such benefits are widely recognized, a significant percentage of individuals across the globe are failing to get sufficient rest, a dangerous reality that could be putting people at risk for various diseases and conditions.

Lack of sleep is such a prominent problem that the research team behind a 2024 study published in the journal *The Lancet: Diabetes & Endocrinology* dubbed insufficient sleep as a “neglected public health issue.” That study surveyed 2,000 adults in the United Kingdom and found that 90 percent of respondents reported current sleep problems, with two-thirds of those individuals indicating they had experienced their issues for more than six years. And it’s not just adults suffering from sleep issues, as a 2023 peer-reviewed editorial written for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the modern 24-hour lifestyle and pervasive utilization of electronics and social media is normalizing insufficient sleep among children and adolescents.

Sleeping problems

are not to be taken lightly, as the National Institutes of Health notes sleep deficiency has been linked to heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression. Children who are not getting enough sleep may experience difficulty paying attention, which could adversely affect their academic performance, and might be prone to misbehavior. Of course, many of these side effects can be avoided by getting sufficient sleep. With that in mind, adults, parents, children, and adolescents can consider these strategies to get a better night’s sleep, courtesy of the Sleep Foundation.

- Replace an old mattress. Old mattresses can be uncomfortable and thus make it harder to fall asleep.

- Block out light. Light exposure adversely affects circadian rhythm, so keep external light out of your bedroom and dim lights as bedtime approaches. Avoiding bright light as you transition to bedtime can contribute to the production of the hormone melatonin, which facilitates sleep.

- Set an appropriate temperature. The Sleep Foundation advises setting a bedroom temperature

thermostat to between 65 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit to prevent feelings of being too hot or too cold when going to bed.

- Wake up at the same time each day. A routine that includes the same wake-up time each day can acclimate the body to a healthy sleep routine.

- Begin to relax 30 minutes before bed. A pre-bedtime routine focused on relaxation can facilitate sleep. The Sleep Foundation notes activities like quiet reading, low-impact stretching, listening to soothing music, and mindfulness meditation can help you ease into sleep.
- Avoid devices an

hour before bed. The light emitted by tablets, smartphones and laptops can suppress melatonin production, making it hard to fall asleep. Make the hour before bedtime each night a device-free time.

- Exercise each day, but avoid intense activity close to bedtime. Daily exercise

has been found to promote sleep, but intense exercise right before bed can make it hard for the body to settle down.

Insufficient sleep is an emerging issue for people of all ages across the globe. Some simple strategies can be employed to facilitate a better night’s rest.

Protecting your mental health

When seeking to be as healthy as possible, it’s important that people do not overlook the importance of protecting mental health. The World Health Organization says more than a billion people across the globe live with a mental health condition. The need for action on mental health is urgent and undeniable, as safeguarding mental health is integral to a person’s well-being.

The National Institute of Mental Health says that mental health is more than just the absence of a mental illness. It includes emotional, psychological and social well-being. Self-care and action play key roles in maintaining good mental health and getting support and treatment if a seri-

ous issue is present. Here are steps anyone can take each day to protect their mental health.

- Exercise regularly. Just 30 minutes of exercise most days, which can include walking, can boost a person’s mood and improve health. The NIMH says small amounts of exercise add up, so it’s possible to spread out the 30 minutes over the course of the day. Exercising outdoors also exposes a person to natural sunlight, which is proven to boost mood.

- Foster relationships. Good relationships are important for mental well-being. If possible, a person should take time each day to be with family, friends or colleagues. Volunteer work at a local school, community

group or hospital can foster socialization for those who may not be able to get together with friends or family with regularity.

- Learn new skills. The United Kingdom-based NHS Services says research shows learning new skills can improve mental well-being by boosting self-esteem and self-confidence. It also helps identify a sense of purpose.

- Relax. People should schedule time for relaxation and stress management. Yoga, meditation, reading, or spending time in nature are great ways to slow down, relax and recharge.

- Seek help. Anyone with a mental health concern should seek someone to talk to. For some, simply talking things through with a friend or family member may be enough to resolve issues. Others may find that talking to a therapist or counselor is the best course of action. There also are support groups where others who

understand similar experiences can provide validation and support.

- Curtail harmful behaviors. Some people turn to drugs and alcohol to mitigate mental health issues. This self-medication is harmful and can exacerbate mental health conditions. Individuals should consult with medical professionals if they suspect they may need medication or additional help to treat mental health issues.

Efforts to safeguard mental health are essential. Anyone who has concerns about their mental health or the mental health of others should speak first to a primary care provider. He or she can then offer a referral to a qualified mental health professional.

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