

## Benefits of a Good Sleep

Catching some zzzzz's, we all love it, especially when you wake up from a great night's sleep. In the past, sleep was often ignored by doctors and surrounded by [myths](#), but now we are beginning to understand the importance of sleep to overall health and well-being. In fact, when people get less than 6 or 7 hours of sleep each night, their risk for developing diseases begins to increase.

How Much Sleep Do You Need? The body needs 7-8 hours of sleep per day; 6 hours or less triples your risk of a car accident. (Interestingly, too much sleep--more than 9 hours--can actually be harmful for your health; recent studies show that those who sleep more than 9 hours per day don't live as long as their 8-hour-sleep counterparts!)

The Effects of Missed Sleep: Sleep is cumulative; if you lose sleep one day, you feel it the next. If you miss adequate sleep several days in a row, you build up a 'sleep deficit', which impairs the following:

- Reaction time
- Judgment
- Vision
- Information processing
- Short-term memory
- Performance
- Motivation
- Vigilance
- Patience

Fatigued people also experience more moodiness, aggressive behaviors, [burnout](#) and more stress.

### 1. [Sleep Keeps Your Heart Healthy](#)

Heart attacks and strokes are more common during the early morning hours. This fact may be explained by the way sleep interacts with the blood vessels. Lack of sleep has been associated with worsening of blood pressure and cholesterol, all risk factors for [heart disease](#) and stroke.

### 2. [Sleep May Prevent Cancer](#)

People working the late shift have a higher risk for breast and colon cancer. Researchers believe this link is caused by differing levels of melatonin in people who are exposed to light at night. Light exposure reduces the level of melatonin, a hormone that both makes us sleepy and is thought to protect against cancer. Melatonin appears to suppress the growth of tumors. Be sure that your bedroom is dark to help your body produce the melatonin it needs.

### 3. [Sleep Reduces Stress](#)

When your body is sleep deficient, it goes into a state of stress. The body's functions are put on high alert which causes an increase in blood pressure and a production of stress hormones. Higher

blood pressure increases your risk for heart attacks and strokes. The stress hormones also, unfortunately, make it harder for you to sleep.

#### 4. [Sleep Reduces Inflammation](#)

The increase in stress hormones raises the level of inflammation in your body, also creating more risk for heart-related conditions, as well as cancer and diabetes. [Inflammation](#) is thought to be one of the causes of the deterioration of your body as you age.

#### 5. [Sleep Makes You More Alert](#)

Of course, a good night's sleep makes you feel energized and alert the next day. Being engaged and active not only feels great, it increases your chances for another good night's sleep. When you wake up feeling refreshed, use that energy to get out into the daylight, do active things, and be engaged in your world. You'll sleep better the next night and increase your daily energy level.

#### 6. [Sleep Bolsters Your Memory](#)

Researchers do not fully understand why we sleep and dream, but a process called memory consolidation occurs during sleep. While your body may be resting, your brain is busy processing your day, making connections between events, sensory input, feelings and memories. Your dreams and deep sleep are an important time for your brain to make memories and links.

#### 7. [Sleep May Help You Lose Weight](#)

Researchers have also found that people who sleep less than seven hours per night are more likely to be overweight or obese. Lack of sleep impacts the balance of hormones in the body that affect appetite. The hormones ghrelin and leptin, important for the regulation of appetite, have been found to be disrupted by lack of sleep.

#### 8. [Naps Make You Smarter](#)

Napping during the day is not only an effective and refreshing alternative to caffeine, it can also protect your health and make you more productive. Napping also improves memory, cognitive function and mood.

#### 9. [Sleep May Reduce Your Risk for Depression](#)

Sleep impacts many of the chemicals in your body, including serotonin. People with a deficiency in serotonin are more likely to suffer from depression.

#### 10. [Sleep Helps the Body Make Repairs](#)

Sleep is a time for your body to repair damage caused by stress, ultraviolet rays and other harmful exposures. Your cells produce more protein while you are sleeping. These protein molecules form the building blocks for cells, allowing them to repair damage.