

# March Health Tip

## Health Ministries

### Is Your Lack of Sleep Increasing Your Risk for Heart Disease and Stroke?

While you are sleeping you are unconscious, but your brain and body functions are still active. Sleep is a complex biological process that helps you process new information, stay healthy, and feel rested. During sleep, your brain cycles through five stages: stage 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (rapid eye movement - REM sleep). Different things happen during each stage - different brain wave patterns, breathing, heart rate and body temperature. The phases of sleep help you:

- Feel rested and energetic the next day
- Learn information, get insight, and form memories
- Give your heart and vascular system a rest
- Release more growth hormone, which helps children grow, and also boosts muscle mass and the repair of cells and tissues in children and adults
- Release sex hormones, which contributes to puberty and fertility
- Prevent sickness or help you get better when you are sick by creating more cytokines (hormones that help the immune system fight various infections)

You need all the stages to achieve healthy sleep.

#### What are the health effects of not getting enough sleep?

Sleep is important for overall health. When you don't get enough sleep (sleep deprivation), it does more than just make you feel tired. It can affect your performance, including your ability to think clearly, react quickly, and form memories. This may cause you to make bad decisions and take more risks. For example, people with sleep deprivation are more likely to get into accidents.

Sleep deprivation can also affect your mood, leading to:

- Irritability
- Problems with relationships, especially for children and teenagers
- Depression
- Anxiety

It can also affect your physical health. Research shows that not getting enough sleep, or getting poor-quality sleep, increases your risk of:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Kidney disease
- Obesity
- Type 2 diabetes



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Not getting enough sleep can also mean that you don't get enough of the hormones that help children grow and help adults and children build muscle mass, fight infections, and repair cells.

Sleep deprivation magnifies the effect of alcohol. A tired person who drinks too much alcohol will be more impaired than a well-rested person.

### **How can I get better sleep?**

You can take steps to improve your sleep habits. First, make sure that you allow yourself enough time to sleep. With enough sleep each night, you may find that you're happier and more productive during the day.

#### **To improve your sleep habits, it also may help to:**

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- Avoid caffeine, especially in the afternoon and evening
- Avoid nicotine
- Exercise regularly, but don't exercise too late in the day
- Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed
- Avoid large meals and beverages late at night
- Don't take a nap after 3 p.m.
- Relax before bed, for example by taking a bath, reading or listening to relaxing music
- Keep the temperature in your bedroom cool
- Get rid of distractions in the bedroom - noises, bright lights, TV or computer
- Don't use your phone or tablet just before bed
- Get enough sunlight exposure during the day
- Don't lie in bed awake; if you can't sleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing

#### **If you are a shift worker, it can be even harder to get a restful sleep. You may also want to:**

- Take naps and increase the amount of time available for sleep
- Keep the lights bright at work
- Limit shift changes so your body clock can adjust
- Limit caffeine use to the first part of your shift
- Remove sound and light distractions in your bedroom during daytime sleep (for example, use light-blocking curtains)

See a doctor if you have trouble sleeping. You may have a sleep disorder, such as insomnia or sleep apnea. In some cases, your doctor may want you to do a sleep study to help diagnose the problem.

Source: Medlineplus.gov

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