



## Why A Good Night's Sleep is So Important and How to Achieve It

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Multiple studies and medical sources, including the CDC, have stated that the optimal amount of sleep that an adult needs for good health is 7-9 hours a night. I can already hear many of you chuckling over that fact. Truth be told, a good night's sleep often eludes us as we grow older, from several contributing factors, including:

- Changes in our circadian rhythm as we age
- Changes in hormone production of melatonin and cortisol which help induce sleep
- Pain
- Medications we take
- Anxiety and depression
- Restless Leg Syndrome
- Sleep Apnea
- Nocturia - waking up during the night to urinate

If you experience any of these issues, you are not alone. It is estimated that between 40%-70% of the senior population has chronic sleep issues. Getting too little sleep can wreak havoc with your health and has been associated with cardiac issues, forms of cancer, a decrease in memory, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, obesity, lower hormone levels, increased anxiety and depression, increased risk of falls and accidents and lower immunity to ward off illness.

According to research done by Dr. Matthew Walker, professor of neuroscience and the director of the Center for Human Sleep Science at the University of California, Berkeley, it has long been known that people sleeping less than 6 hours a night, or those with sleep disorders such as insomnia and sleep apnea, are at a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's. A lack of sleep causes a larger accumulation of toxic beta-amyloid proteins that contribute to Alzheimer's disease, to build up in the brain. Recent science has shown that deep sleep helps to cleanse the brain of these toxic proteins that build up while we are awake.

Like most things when it comes to our health, it is better to start early when it comes to getting adequate sleep, but never too late to start. Studies have shown that middle-aged and older adults, who successfully treated their sleep disorders, were able to delay the onset of dementia by up to 10 years. And lest you believe that you can make up for lost sleep by sleeping in on subsequent days – you can't. According to Dr. Walker, you claim back less than 50% of lost sleep and your sleep deficit escalates over time.

All of this is well and good, but what can you do to overcome sleep problems and get a better night's rest? On the bright side, there are many things you can do to promote quality sleep.

- Engage in relaxing activities before bedtime like taking a bath or shower, reading, listening to soothing music, meditating or anything that quiets your mind and body.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Avoid napping during the day which can disrupt nighttime slumber.
- Create an atmosphere conducive to sleep with good bedding, low lighting, comfortable room temperature and quiet. Limit your bed to sleeping and sex and remove distractions like tv, computer, tablets and smart phones.
- Exercise. Seniors who regularly exercise fall asleep faster, sleep longer and have better quality sleep. Since exercise too close to bedtime can keep you revved up, make sure you to stop at least 3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine after 12 pm. Caffeine blocks adenosine, a chemical in your brain that causes you to feel sleepy. Limiting caffeine to the morning hours gives your body the time it needs to clear it away.
- Avoid alcohol consumption and large meals close to bedtime as both can keep you awake.
- Limit consumption of liquids after dinner if waking up to urinate is an issue.

If, after changing your sleep habits, you still have difficulty falling and staying asleep, or feel tired during the day, you should seek medical help and consult with your doctor.



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