

Adult Health Bulletin



MARCH 2016

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K-State Research & Extension
Atchison County Office
405 Main/PO Box 109
Effingham, KS 66023
913-833-5450
www.atchison.ksu.edu

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: HOW IMPORTANT IS SLEEP?

Do you feel like you are always tired? Perhaps you tell yourself that you will catch up on sleep when it gets to the weekend or when things “settle down.” Sleep is a very important part of staying healthy. And just like food, water and oxygen that are needed to survive, people need sleep. Further, sleep can be a critical component to overall health and well-being.

It would not be a stretch to think that you probably already know that sleep is important. But did you know that the average American reports getting approximately 7.5 hours of sleep a night. If you think this is an adequate amount, you might be interested to know that the recommendation is 7 to 9 hours of sleep a day. Further, according to the 2014 Sleep Index by the National Sleep Foundation, over 35 percent of the population surveyed reported their sleep as “poor” or “only fair.” Only 12 percent reported it to be “excellent”, and 18 percent as “very good.”



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Sleep is very important because it helps with brain functions, emotional well-being, physical health and the ability to function throughout the day.

Brain function

Sleep is very important to make sure that the brain is working the way it should. In fact, while our bodies are resting, our brains are very active. Studies have shown that our brains use the time that we are sleeping to both make existing pathways stronger and to build new ones. New pathways created in the brain actually help increase concentration. Further, when we have not had enough sleep, our brain actually slows down the thinking process. This can lead to confusion and even increase the likelihood of making poor choices.

When there is continual lack of sleep, there is an increased chance of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke.

Emotional well-being

Sleep also plays a large role in the moods we have. If a person does not get enough sleep regularly, he or she is more likely to experience depression. Further, when someone does not have enough sleep, the more likely one is to be angry, have mood swings and lack motivation.

Physical health

The lack of sleep also affects the risk of chronic disease and obesity. When there is continual lack of sleep, there is an increased chance of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke. Also, the body's hormone balance is lost and a person is more likely to feel hungrier when he or she does not get enough sleep because of the imbalance of hormones. Growth also is affected by off balance



hormones when not getting adequate sleep. When one does not get enough sleep, there is a greater chance that that individual will have trouble fighting off common illnesses.

Daily functioning

When up late, just one or two nights, the body is not as on task as it could be. When people need sleep, they usually are much less productive during the day. It can be very dangerous too. Driving while sleepy is a serious issue. Studies show that driving while sleep deprived can actually harm the ability to drive as much as drunk driving. In fact, it is shown that sleepy driving is the cause of almost 100,000 accidents a year — 5,000 to 6,000 of them with fatal injuries.

Not having a good night's sleep on a regular basis is actually harmful to your body. If you are not getting enough sleep, talk to your healthcare provider about ways to help you get the sleep you need.

SOURCES:

- NIH: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd>
- Sleep.org : <https://sleep.org>
- National Sleep Foundation: <https://sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/myths-and-facts-about-sleep>

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Written by: Nicole Peritore
Edited by: Connee Wheeler
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
Stock images: 123RF.com

