

Sleep update 2007

Not tonight, honey. Many U.S. women are too tired for sex, according to a recent poll.

The National Sleep Foundation reports that more than half of American women are not getting enough sleep—with stay-at-home moms suffering the most—which interferes with eating healthily, spending time with friends and having sex.

Nearly 70 percent of women say they frequently have a problem sleeping, with most of them stressed or anxious, and 60 percent only get a good night's sleep a few nights a week.

"Sleep in America" poll found 74 percent of stay-at-home mothers suffered insomnia at least a few nights a week and 59 percent said they woke up not feeling refreshed.

A third of one's life is spent asleep. During sleep it may appear nothing productive is happening. But sleep is tremendously important. We need sleep as much as food! Quality sleep is vital for optimal health and performance, increasing one's work efficiency, even helping cure illnesses.

The amount of sleep a person gets affects his or her physical health, emotional well-being, mental abilities, productivity and performance. Recent studies associate lack of sleep with serious health problems such as an increased risk of depression, obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Now, a new study from China has linked sleep deprivation to smoking and drinking in adolescents. The results showed that sleeping less than eight hours a night was significantly associated with drinking. Smoking also was related to inadequate sleep, as was going to bed later than midnight.

Once initiated, alcohol and nicotine dependency further interfere with normal patterns of sleep, creating a vicious cycle of stress.

The studies suggest that addressing sleep problems early might help stem the tide of adolescent substance abuse.

Missing out on sleep may cause the brain to stop producing new cells, a study has suggested.

The research on rats, by a team at Princeton University, showed that lack of sleep affected the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved in forming memories.

Sleep deprivation raised the levels of a stress hormone called cortisol in the rats, which in turn was associated with shrinkage of the hippocampus.

When cortisol levels were kept in check, hippocampal damage was halted.

The study demonstrates that sleep is an essential element in neurogenesis, or brain repair. Pulling an all-nighter before an exam is likely to worsen memory performance.

Athletes who get an extra amount of sleep are more likely to improve their performance in a game, according to recent research.

The study was conducted on six healthy students on the Stanford men's basketball team. Significant improvements in athletic performance were observed when the

athletes slept more, including faster sprint time and increased free-throws. Athletes also reported increased energy and improved mood during practices and games, as well as a decreased level of fatigue.

In addition to affecting athletic performance, recent studies associate lack of sleep with serious health problems such as an increased risk of depression, obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. And if you think this story just applies to jocks, please recall the studies that show that memory and test performance are enhanced by adequate sleep.

A sleepless night can leave you bleary-eyed the next morning. But did you know that insomnia can actually cloud your moral judgment?

Army researchers found that when they subjected a group of volunteers to two sleepless nights, the lack of shut-eye seemed to hinder participants' ability to make decisions in the face of emotionally charged, moral dilemmas.

The scenarios presented to the sleep-deprived GI's were only hypothetical, but they were designed to mirror the kinds of moral quandaries routinely faced by soldiers in actual combat situations.

It's possible, they speculate, that sleeplessness slows the brain's ability to integrate cognitive and emotional information, which is needed to address serious moral dilemmas.

The results were presented in the medical journal *Sleep*.

Do you rely on sleeping pills to get a good night's rest? If so, the Food and Drug Administration wants to make you aware of some bizarre and potentially serious side effects of popular sleep meds.

Commonly prescribed drugs such as Ambien and Lunesta and the new medication Rozerem can cause odd and potentially dangerous behaviors. These include severe allergic reactions that warrant stronger warnings, according to U.S. health officials. Worse yet, taking sleep drugs can produce weird behaviors, such as driving while asleep.

Some patients taking the medications also were found to make phone calls, have sex, eat and cook while asleep-without any recollection whatsoever.

The Food and Drug Administration has just called for new black box warnings on 13 of the most popular prescription sleep meds, but it stopped short of saying the problems were serious enough to warrant withdrawing the drugs from the market. Avoiding caffeine in drinks and any alcohol a few hours before bedtime can improve sleep. Additionally, finish any exercise or workouts at least three hours before going to sleep. A cool, dark and quiet room without computers or TV may also help.

A low glycemic index diet such as the Salad and Salmon Diet has proven helpful in alleviating insomnia because it eliminates dips in blood sugar that may interrupt sleep.

Supplements that may aid sleep include:

Melatonin

Valerian

Hops

Jamaican dogwood

GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid)

Tryptophan and 5-Hydroxytryptophan

Vitamin B6 and pyridoxal 5-phosphate