

Sleep your way to better health

written by Allison Fingleton | August 25, 2020



We're all looking for ways to improve our health—especially ways that don't require us to carve out too much time in our already demanding lives.

Luckily, there's one thing you can do to improve your health that won't interrupt your daytime plans: Sleep.

Yes, that's right—sleep.

Many people don't realize how much adequate sleep (or the lack thereof) can impact their health, but getting enough shut-eye can improve issues ranging from your memory, your mood, and even your weight! Ideally, most adults should be getting between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night in order to be fully rested.

Here are a few surprising ways that adequate sleep can improve your overall health:

The Heart of the Matter

Sleep is a time of rest and repair for your body—and it's crucial for protecting your heart health. While you sleep, your blood pressure lowers, giving your circulatory system some much-needed rest. If you shortchange your body on time spent asleep, you'll lose out on some of its restorative value. Spending more time with your blood pressure heightened can lead to an increased risk of adverse health effects.

Weighing the Benefits

It may seem too good to be true, but you really *can* sleep your way to a slimmer waistline—if you're currently under-rested. Researchers have found that fewer hours spent asleep can equal more stubborn pounds—likely caused by the effects it can have on our hormones. Lack of sleep can disrupt appetite-regulating hormones like ghrelin and leptin, making it harder for you to feel satiated during the day. It can also increase the stress hormone cortisol, which impacts your body's insulin response, and may cause you to hold onto unwanted pounds.

Inflammatory Remarks

Elevated stress hormones can also affect your body's inflammatory response, leading to increased inflammation body-wide. Numerous health issues have been tied to elevated long-term inflammation, from heart disease to diabetes and

even cancer. Getting a solid eight hours of sleep per night can help lower those stress hormones and give your body a better chance at staving off these ill effects.

Dark Clouds Roll In

It's no secret that a bad night's sleep can lead to a sour mood the next day, but long-term lack of sleep can have a much deeper impact on your emotional health. The chemical serotonin is closely tied to your sleep cycle, and extended periods of too little sleep can cause a gradual decline in serotonin levels. This vital chemical is one of the ways your body regulates anxiety, happiness, and mood, so this drop off can lead to increased feelings of depression and anxiousness.

Jogging Your Memory

Mom was right all those years she insisted you get a good night's sleep before a big test! Sleep plays a crucial role in both learning and memory. While we sleep, our brain sorts and stores all the information it's gathered during the day, and the neurons we rely on to recall that learned information later need plenty of rest each night to recharge. If they're overworked by lack of sleep, we may find it harder to call up information we've learned and focus on the tasks at hand. Sleep deprivation's effects on mood can also impact memory and learning, making it harder for us to acquire (and thus remember) new information.

Clean Up on Aisle...

Sleep is also the time that our body repairs itself. While we shut down for the night, our immune system goes to work on everything from wound healing to disease fighting to fixing up daily wear and tear we put our bodies through. Getting adequate sleep gives your immune system time to work, helping you bounce back more quickly from whatever ails you.

Skin Deep

In addition to affecting wound healing, sleep also affects skin hydration and collagen growth. Those who don't get adequate sleep may find themselves reaching for extra moisturizer or frowning over more fine lines and wrinkles. To keep your skin looking younger longer, try to get that coveted 7-9 hours of sleep per night.

A Sign of the Times

Sleep can be harder to come by in times of uncertainty and unease—something we're all dealing with right now. If you're struggling to get adequate sleep, take some time to create a plan for good "sleep hygiene." Resist the urge to work from home in the comfort of your bed; try to reserve your bed for sleep and relaxation only, so when you hit the mattress, your body knows it's time for rest.

You should also limit the everyday things that may be keeping you up—especially caffeine and the blue light that emanates from your electronic devices. Limit your caffeine intake to the morning hours and give your electronic devices their own bedtime—preferably a couple of hours before your own. If you can't bring yourself to unplug entirely, most phones and computers these days have options to shift the blue-yellow balance of your

screens later in the day, to reduce your exposure to stimulating blue light.

Many are hesitant to take prescription sleep aids, but there are natural solutions available that can help. The most common is melatonin, which aims to supplement your body's own production of this important hormone in order to promote the relaxation necessary for restful sleep. Other supplements have proven beneficial, as well. Magnesium glycinate is particularly effective, combining the stress and anxiety-relieving benefits of magnesium with the sleep-inducing amino acid glycine. Our bodies don't produce magnesium on their own, and many of us don't consume enough magnesium-rich foods to meet optimal levels. For that reason, it can be helpful to include supplemental magnesium glycinate in your routine, especially if you've been having trouble sleeping.

And finally, adequate physical activity during the day can go a long way toward helping you have a restful night. Try to work in a little bit of active time each day, even if it's just a speed walk around the neighborhood, or a yoga video from the comfort of your own living room.

Leverage these tips to increase your sleep quantity and quality—your body will thank you!

Allison Fingleton is Senior Editor for Nutritional Therapeutics, Inc. This article originally appeared on Nutritional Therapeutics' Health Blog, and contains links to products from one of our trusted sponsors.