GOOD SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH

AN EFFECTIVE SELF-CARE STRATEGY INCLUDES GETTING THE REST YOU NEED

Sometimes, the pace of modern life barely gives you time to stop and rest. It can make getting a good night's sleep on a regular basis seem like a dream. But sleep is as important for good health as diet and exercise. Good sleep improves your brain performance, mood, and health.

Not getting enough quality sleep regularly raises the risk of many diseases and disorders. These range from heart disease and stroke to obesity and dementia.

There's more to good sleep than just the hours spent in bed, says Dr. Marishka Brown, a sleep expert at NIH. "Healthy sleep encompasses three major things," she explains. "One is how much sleep you get. Another is sleep quality—that you get uninterrupted and refreshing sleep. The last is a consistent sleep schedule."

Getting Better Sleep:

If you're having trouble sleeping, hearing how important it is may be frustrating. But simple things can improve your odds of a good night's sleep. Treatments are available for many common sleep disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy can help many people with insomnia get better sleep. Medications can also help some people.

Many people with sleep apnea benefit from using a device called a CPAP machine. These machines keep the airway open so that you can breathe. Other treatments can include special mouthguards and lifestyle changes.

For everyone, "as best you can, try to make sleep a priority," Brown says. "Sleep is not a throwaway thing—it's a biological necessity."

Best Practices For Good Nights Sleep:

- Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.
- Get some exercise every day. But not close to bedtime.
- Go outside. Try to get natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes every day.
- Avoid nicotine and caffeine. Both are stimulants that keep you awake. Caffeine can take 6–8 hours to wear off completely.
- Don't take naps after mid-afternoon. And keep them short.
- Avoid alcohol and large meals before bedtime. Both can prevent deep, restorative sleep.
- Limit electronics before bed. Try reading a book, listening to soothing music, or another relaxing activity instead.
- Create a good sleeping environment. Keep the temperature cool if possible. Get rid of sound and light distractions. Make it dark. Silence your cell phone.
- Don't lie in bed awake. If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy again.
- See your health care provider if nothing you try helps. They can determine if you need further testing. They can also help you learn new ways to manage stress.