



Are You Getting Enough Zzzz's to Stay Healthy? **By Camille Bartus, FCPS Wellness Specialist**

Since the 1950's, research on sleep has demonstrated that the body performs important physiological processes during the sleep cycle that are integral to maintaining good physical and mental health. The National Sleep Foundation reports that most adults should get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night to feel rested. A recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report estimated 50-60 million people in the United States have chronic sleep and wakefulness disorders that could impact their overall health.

Scientific studies continue to reveal that a lack of sleep, both in quality and quantity, can be linked to a myriad of health problems such as cardiac risk factors, obesity, depression, immune disorders and more. The Harvard Nurse's Study has also linked insufficient or irregular sleep to an increased risk of colon and breast cancer, heart disease and diabetes. According to the National Institute of Health Neurological Disorders and Stroke, too little sleep creates a sleep debt that needs to be paid back eventually or health suffers.

It is generally agreed upon that Americans today get less sleep than prior generations, though the reasons for this and why people have more difficulty sleeping now are not precisely known. However, it is suspected that lifestyle choices, a constant flow of information in what has become a 24/7 society and a general lack of exercise may be contributing factors. Certainly, the ever ubiquitous Starbucks on every corner can't help.



Sleep disorder include sleep apnea, narcolepsy, restless legs syndrome and insomnia. Certain sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, can be quite serious because it actually causes a drop in a person's oxygen level during sleep. In this case, it is important for the sufferer to have a complete medical evaluation with proper diagnosis and treatment to prevent the development of further health problems.

The CDC recommends the following tips to help ensure a good night's sleep:

- Keep to a sleep schedule as much as possible and try to get between 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
- Try to exercise at least 30 minutes a day, preferably not within 2 hours of sleeping.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- Avoid going to bed with a full stomach.
- Sleep in a dark, well ventilated room.
- Use the bed for sleeping - not watching TV.

If you find that you fall asleep frequently during the day, especially within five minutes of sitting still, or regularly have trouble sleeping a night, you should see your doctor for an evaluation.

To learn more about sleep and sleep disorders click on the links below:

- What is your sleep IQ? Take the quiz. <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncsdr/patpub/patpub-a.htm>
- National Institutes of Health: Your Guide to Healthy Sleeping
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/healthysleepfs.pdf>
- Sleep Apnea - What Is It?
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/SleepApnea/SleepApnea_WhatIs.html
- The ABC'S of ZZZ's
http://www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.huIXKjM0IxF/b.2419181/k.3D71/ABCs_of_ZZZs_When_you_Cant_Sleep.htm
- Do I Have A Sleep Disorder?
http://www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.huIXKjM0IxF/b.2417415/k.6729/Do_I_Have_a_Sleep_Disorder.htm
- The Doze Family Interactive Tool
http://www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.huIXKjM0IxF/b.2562669/k.A338/Cycles_of_Sleeping_and_Waking_with_the_Doze_Family_Interactive_3D_Educational_Tool.htm
- Resources and Information on Sleep Disorders
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/index.htm>