

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

# Sleep – let’s make time for it

Sleep is as important as a balanced diet and regular exercise in keeping us physically and mentally healthy, yet one third of us don’t get enough. That makes one-third of us irritable, forgetful, less productive and more susceptible to illness, as well as having an increased risk of obesity and chronic health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and depression.

Take our quiz to find out if you are making sleep a priority.

1. **How many hours of uninterrupted sleep do adults require each day?**

    1. Four to six
    2. Seven to nine
    3. Ten to twelve

    **Answer: b).** According to the National Sleep Foundation, adults (18-64) require seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

2. **The older we get, the less sleep we need.**

    - True
    - False

    **Answer: False.** Our need for sleep remains more or less the same throughout adulthood although our sleeping patterns do change as we age – we wake more easily and spend more time in light sleep.

3. **Which of the following are signs you’re not getting enough sleep?**

    1. Forgetfulness
    2. Inability to focus
    3. Weight gain
    4. All of the above

    **Answer: d).** If you experience persistent sleep problems, consult your doctor.

4. **During sleep your brain rests.**

    - True
    - False

    **Answer: False.** Your body is resting and restoring but your brain remains active. Much of that activity involves learning and remembering.

5. **Reading in bed is a great way to prepare for sleep.**

    - True
    - False

    **Answer: False.** Reading, watching TV or using electronic devices in bed stimulates your brain.

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6. **A nightcap helps you relax before bed.**

    - True
    - False

    **Answer: False.** Alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but it worsens the quality of your sleep.

7. **Snoring is nothing to worry about.**

    - True
    - False

    **Answer: False.** Persistent loud snoring at night and daytime sleepiness are the main symptoms of a common yet serious sleep disorder ─ sleep apnea. Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns.

8. **What are the causes of sleep problems?**

    1. Sleep disorders
    2. Stress and anxiety
    3. Electric light
    4. All of the above

    **Answer: d).** If you experience persistent sleep problems, consult your doctor.

**How did you do? Do you think you need help making sleep a priority?**

Here are some tips that can help make a difference in improving your sleeping patterns:

- Stick to a schedule. Go to bed and get up around the same time every day – including weekends.
- Ditch the electronic devices at least an hour before going to bed. Connecting to social media, playing video games, responding to emails or watching TV stimulates the brain, making it harder for us to fall asleep. In addition, exposure to the blue light that our devices emit suppresses our melatonin levels – a chemical that helps us sleep.
- Create a cool, quiet and comfortable sleeping environment. Invest in a good mattress and pillows and keep the room temperature comfortable.
- Try not to nap.Napping disrupts your sleep-wake cycle. If you must nap, limit it to 10 to 20 minutes.
- Don’t eat a heavy or spicy meal or a sugary snack before going to sleep.
- Exercise regularly but not too close to bedtime.
- Cut down on or avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, soft drinks) six to eight hours before going to bed. Caffeine is a stimulant that stays in the body for several hours – up to 12 hours for some people.
- Dim and/or reduce the lights in your home as bedtime nears. Artificial light tricks our brains into thinking it’s daylight and therefore not time to sleep.
- Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.

Our busy, and often stressful, lifestyles can make getting enough sleep difficult. In order to build better resilience skills we need to make restful, restorative sleep a priority.