

Slumbering ON SLEEP DEBT

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It's a well-known fact that Americans live busy and hectic lives. Research reveals that people are staying up longer at night and sleeping less than ever before. The National Sleep Foundation has declared April 23rd - 29th as Sleep Awareness Week. According to the NSF, significant damage occurs to our bodies and brains from not getting enough sleep. Recent studies on this growing issue are eye-opening...literally.

The recommended amount of sleep for an adult is 7-9 hours, but 30% of Americans get less than 6 hours of sleep each night. Staying awake for 24 hours without sleeping is equivalent to a blood-alcohol content of legal intoxication in all 50 states. Another alarming statistic shows that people who only get 4-5 hours of sleep before getting in a car are 4 times more likely to crash than those who have slept for 7 or more hours. This failure to get enough sleep is known as Insufficient Sleep Syndrome, has resulted in an average of 1,500 deaths each year in the United States, and costs approximately \$66 billion annually in health care expenses and lost productivity. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, Insufficient Sleep Syndrome is a voluntary, but unintentional, choice that a person makes that keeps them from getting enough sleep.

Insufficient Sleep Syndrome results in sleep debt, which is defined as the difference between the amount of sleep that a person needs and the amount of sleep they're actually getting. Sleep debt transpires after not receiving the necessary amount of sleep for several nights in a row. Surprisingly, the effects of getting 2-3 hours less sleep than what your body requires, for as little as a few consecutive nights, is the same as pulling an all-nighter.

The recommended duration of sleep for a person varies depending on their age and genes. The following web site provides an age-specific graph with the latest recommendations for how much sleep a person should get: <https://sleepfoundation.org>.

Chronic sleep debt has staggering effects on the body and brain ranging from depression, memory loss or forgetfulness, increased blood pressure, weight gain, decreased immune system, and an increased appearance in age. Other serious consequences of long term sleep loss include hallucinations, psychosis, possible loss of brain tissue, diabetes, stroke, heart attack, as well as heart failure.

Are you someone who has sleep debt or do you know someone who suffers from sleep debt? Fortunately, there are some recommendations in which you can reverse the process and improve your quality of life. Instead of sleeping in later on mornings, experts suggest to go to bed earlier and wake up at your normal time by setting your bedtime back 15 minutes each night. This will gradually shift your body's clock and allow you to get the required sleep you need. Once you have reached your required amount of sleep, it is recommended that you maintain a regular sleep and wake schedule, even on weekends and vacations. Also, avoid caffeine and alcohol, and exercise daily, to help improve sleep debt. Implement a regular routine of relaxation before bedtime, such as taking a hot bath or reading a book instead of using electronics. Finally, take a nap, if able, during the day to help reduce sleep debt, but be careful not to nap for too long or it will disrupt your sleep that night.

Staying consistent with these practices will get you back on track in achieving the much-needed sleep that your body and brain deserve, and it will make a difference between night and day.