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Tired of Feeling Tired?

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Sixty percent of adults have a sleep problem.

Tired of Feeling Tired?

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Cell phones disrupt normal sleep.

Sleep deprivation is now accepted as a normal way of life in America! Many people feel unrefreshed when they get up in the morning, which leaves them so sleepy it interferes with their daily activities.

A 2011 national poll found that 43 percent of Americans between the ages of 13 and 64 reported that they rarely or never get a good night's sleep on weeknights. About 15 percent of adults between 19 and 64 say they sleep less than six hours on weeknights. Sixty percent claim they experience a sleep problem almost every night. Why?

One main reason is that Americans actively use electronic technology within an hour before bedtime. Almost everyone surveyed used television, computers, video games or a cell phone shortly before bedtime. Exposure to light-emitting screens for extended periods during the nighttime suppresses the release of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, enhances alertness, and shifts circadian rhythms to a later hour, thereby making it more difficult to fall asleep.

Cell phones clearly disturb sleep. About one in ten of 13- to 18-year-olds say they are awakened after they go to bed almost every night by a phone call, text message or email. About one in five of 19- to 29-year-olds say this happens at least a few nights a week. Many young people, especially the 13- to 18-year-olds, report they struggle with sleepiness during the day. To cope with their sleepiness, people are drinking more caffeine-containing beverages than ever, increasing the risk of insomnia. On a typical weekday, the average person consumes three 12-ounce cans of caffeinated beverages.

When asked to evaluate the day after getting inadequate sleep, 85 percent said that it affects their mood, about 70 percent said it affects their family life or social life, and 74 percent of those older than 30 said that sleepiness affects their work. Sleep deprivation is often an underlying factor in the anxiety and depression seen in college students.

Sleep debt directly impacts memory and mental efficiency, while chronic sleep loss can impair the immune system function.

The following tips are provided to help you achieve the benefits of sleep.

1. Maintain a regular time for going to bed and waking up.
2. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine or ritual. A warm bath or shower and reading a book or listening to soothing music helps one fall asleep.
3. Create an environment which is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool, that is conducive to sleep. Avoid exposure to bright light before bedtime. If necessary, use eye shades, ear plugs and "white noise" to facilitate sleep.
4. Give yourself time to wind down before bed. Don't contemplate your milelong to-do list.
5. Use your bedroom only for sleep and not for answering phone calls and emails, or watching television.
6. Avoid a heavy meal too close to bedtime. Finish eating at least three hours before your regular bedtime.
7. Regular exercise makes falling to sleep easier and contributes to sounder sleep. Exercise boosts the effect of natural sleep hormones such as melatonin.
8. Avoid tea, coffee and other caffeinated beverages. They keep you awake at night, and caffeine can change the quality of your sleep.

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