

How Sleeping could save your life!

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Work's hectic, the holiday doesn't pay for itself and that nagging ex of yours needs to know NOW what the Christmas plans are for the kids.....no wonder you're battling to sleep! But lack of shut-eye should not be taken lightly. Studies have now shown that insomnia can increase your risk of developing and/or dying from cardiovascular disease.

A study published in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* in 2012 saw that insomnia increased one's risk by more than 45% of developing or dying from cardiovascular disease.

Another study linked insomnia with increased risk of Heart Failure. The researchers looked at data relating to symptoms of insomnia from 54,279 people between 1995 and 1997, none of whom at the beginning of the study, had heart failure. By 2008, an excess of 1,400 people had developed heart failure. After accounting for different factors, such as heart disease risk, age or psychological factors, insomnia symptoms stayed strongly linked to heart failure, with the more symptoms linked to a higher risk. For eg: individuals who reported having "difficulty in falling asleep" on "almost every night" had a 27-66% larger risk of developing heart failure compared with people with a lack of insomnia symptoms. However, those who reported "difficulty in falling asleep" on a more frequent basis, as well as "difficulty maintaining sleep" and feeling that the sleep they were getting was "non-restorative," had a risk of heart failure ranging from 2- 5x higher when compared to those with no insomnia symptoms.

Sounds Morbid doesn't it? But it needn't be. Here are 10 tips to getting a good night's sleep:

1. **Set a sleep schedule-** Go to bed at a set time every night and make sure you get up at the same set time every morning, try keep to this routine even on weekends. A regular sleep pattern keeps your biological clock steady so you rest better.
2. **Stop smoking-** One reason of many, but nicotine is a stimulant, so it prevents you from falling asleep. Additionally, many smokers experience their withdrawal pangs predominantly at night. Studies show that smokers are 4x more likely not to feel as well rested after a night's sleep than nonsmokers, and smoking makes sleep apnea and other breathing disorders worse, which in essence can then also stop you from getting a good night's rest.
3. **Exercise, but not within 4 hours of bedtime-** Working out, especially cardio, is known to improve the quality and length of your sleep. However, take note that as little as 30 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise will keep your body temperature elevated for roughly around 4 hours, thus affecting your sleep. When your body temperature starts to decrease, however, it sends a signal to your brain to release sleep-inducing melatonin, so you'll then get drowsy.
4. **Put that cup of coffee down after 2pm-** That means coffee, tea, as well as those fizzy drinks. Caffeine is a stimulant that stays in your system for about 8 hours, so if you have a post dinner cappuccino, it may prevent your brain from entering deep sleep or stop you from falling asleep altogether when it comes to bedtime.
5. **Take the time to unwind and de-stress-** Sleep is not an on-off button. It's important to give your body time to make the transition from your active day to bedtime drowsiness.

6. **Snack on Tryptophan containing foods-** The ideal nighttime snack is a combination of carbohydrates and either calcium or a protein that contains tryptophan (the amino acid) studies show that both of these combinations boost serotonin levels, a chemical in your brain that is naturally occurring and helps you feel calm. Enjoy your snack about 1 hour before bedtime so that these amino acids have the time to reach your brain. Some good choices include: 1 piece of whole grain toast with a slice of low-fat cheese; banana with 1 teaspoon of peanut butter; FUTURELIFE® powdered range with fat-free milk; or fruit and low-fat yoghurt
7. **Stay cool-** Slipping between cool sheets helps trigger a drop in your body temperature, this change signals the body to produce melatonin, which helps induce sleep. That's why it's also a good idea to take a hot shower or warm bath before going to bed: Both raise your body temperature, after which it gradually lowers in the cooler air, cueing you to feel sleepy.
8. **Eliminate sneaky light sources-** Light is a powerful signal to your brain to be awake. Even the glow from your laptop, tablet, phone, or any other electronics next to your bed may pass through your closed eyelids into your hypothalamus—the part of your brain that controls sleep. This delays your brain's release of the melatonin. Thus, the darker your room is, the more sleep you'll get and the more soundly.
9. **Kick out your furry bedmates-** This may be confusing for some but I'm referring to your four-legged friends. Cats are known to be active late night and early morning, and dogs may scratch, sniff, and snore you awake. More than half of those individuals who sleep with their pets say the animals disturb their sleep, according to a survey from the Mayo Clinic Sleep Disorders Center. However, if your pet is a good, sound sleeper and cuddling up with him is comforting; it's fine to let him stay put.
10. **Stay put if you wake up-** If you wake up too early and you're not fretting or anxious, rather stay there, in the dark, and do some deep breathing or visualization. However, if lying in bed lands up making you stress more, get up and do something quiet and relaxing (make sure the lighting is dim), such as massaging your feet until you feel sleepy again.

So what is considered the optimal amount of sleep one needs to get in a night?

Experts generally recommend 7-9 hours of sleep a night for healthy adults, but new research is exposing that 7 hours is the best. "The lowest mortality and morbidity is with seven hours," said Shawn Youngstedt, a professor in the College of Nursing and Health Innovation at Arizona State University Phoenix. Now we know about the detrimental effects of not getting enough sleep, recent research has shown that cutting on a full night's sleep, even by 20 minutes, impairs memory and performance the next day; but some are even going as far as saying 8 hours is too much and may also have negative effects on our health- however not all health professionals agree, some firmly believe that when you've had enough sleep your body will wake you up. So our recommendation: a minimum of 7 hours it is.

As you can see getting enough shut-eye is imperative for your heart's health and could even save your life, but not only this, adequate sleeps ensures productivity, concentration, restores tired skin, helps with recovery,... the list goes on. So make sure it becomes a priority!

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