



Words About Wellness

Part 2 of our Two-Part Series on Sleep: What Can You Do To Improve Your Sleep?



Two weeks ago we presented information from Harvard's Get Sleep website that described the negative health outcomes associated with insufficient sleep. The information below, from the same website, helps you figure out how much sleep you need and how to get it.

How much sleep is enough? The amount of sleep that a healthy individual needs is largely determined by two factors: genetics and age. Genetics plays a role in both the amount of sleep a person needs, as well as his or her preference for waking up early or staying up late. Our internal biological clock can vary slightly from individual to individual. Although our internal clock is set to approximately 24 hours, if your clock runs faster than 24 hours, you tend to be a "lark" and wake up early; if your clock runs more slowly, you tend to be an "owl" and go to bed later.

The majority of healthy adults require between 7.5 to 8.5 hours per 24-hour period. This is true from young adulthood through late in life, though many older people have difficulty sleeping in a single block of time each night. The National Sleep Foundation's 2008 Sleep in America poll found that many adults are apparently not meeting their sleep needs, sleeping an average of only 6 hours and 40 minutes during the week, and about 7.5 hours on the weekends.

How to get more/better sleep. Sleep doctors recommend a variety of measures to help adults and children achieve adequate sleep. In general, all of these approaches are intended to help with relaxation as the desired sleep time approaches, to maintain a comfortable sleep environment, and to encourage a healthful balance of nutrition and exercise. Their recommendations include:

- Maintaining a regular sleep-wake schedule
- Avoiding caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that interfere with sleep
- Making your bedroom a comfortable sleep environment
- Establishing a calming pre-sleep routine
- Going to sleep when you're truly tired
- Not watching the clock at night
- Using light to your advantage by exposing yourself to light during the day and limiting light exposure in the evening
- Not napping too close to your regular bedtime
- Eating and drinking enough—but not too much or too soon before bedtime

Learn more about your sleep needs by visiting [this website](#).