

Words About Wellness

Sleep: The Most Important Aspect of Wellness of all

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A Call to Action

Sleep deprivation is like most other public health problems – everybody knows it is a problem, yet we continue to postpone or ignore doing something about it. Americans constantly sacrifice sleep to catch up with other areas of their lives. The CDC was officially declared sleep disorders a public health epidemic (<https://www.sleepdr.com/the-sleep-blog/cdc-declares-sleep-disorders-a-public-health-epidemic/>). They estimate that more than one third of Americans don't get enough sleep.

Sleeplessness is making us overweight, inflamed, ill, and unhappy. Over time, depriving your body of sleep can have work effects of our health and wellness than alcohol, overeating, and lack of exercise. Studies have shown relationships between long-term sleep deprivation and increased risk of diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, depression, and more. It directly affects metabolic processes and the "brain-gut" connection, with loss leading to leaky gut, brain fog, and hormone imbalance. The scientific evidence showing the harmfulness of sleep loss far outweigh documented benefits of most wellness practices, like yoga, green smoothies, and meditation.



Part of the problem is the way sleep is viewed by most people in our society. It can be seen as a luxury "status symbol." Sacrificing sleep is sometimes viewed as a "badge of honor" by busy people, who may even brag about their sleeplessness as a marker of how productive they have been, sacrificing sleep but participating on many other activities. The problem with viewing sleep this way, of course, is that sleep is absolutely necessary for our well-being, and is certainly not just a luxury. Some sleep specialists are arguing that sleep should be considered a type of vital sign in medicine. It should be a top priority for people trying to improve their health.

Most of us already knew that sleep deprivation leads to negative health effects. However, we continue to sacrifice sleep. Many people are not ready or willing to make a change. I personally have been guilty of this same mistake as well – prioritizing other aspects of wellness above sleep. I think I might finally be time for me to sacrifice some other things for the sake of my sleep. And urge you all to do the same.

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Where to Start

Sleep Hygiene

Here are ten tips (adapted from the National Sleep Foundation, 2004) to help work on typical sleep difficulties:

- Keep a regular sleep schedule
- Avoid caffeine, especially at night
- Avoid alcohol
- Don't eat or drink too much near bedtime
- Use relaxing bedtime rituals
- Create a comfortable, sleep-promoting environment
- Limit non-sleep time in bed
- Reduce naps

Get Medical Sleep Disorders Treated

If you are prioritizing sleep but behavioral strategies such as improving sleep hygiene have not helped, consider professional treatment.

For insomnia, cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy is a first-line treatment. Many counselors have experience working on this, and can help you address things that are preventing you from getting adequate sleep, including motivation, anxiety, and depression. Your physician could also try you on pharmacological sleep aids. There are also over-the-counter supplements and other treatments that can help.

If you have sleep apnea, getting this diagnosed and treated is extremely important, as it can cause a whole host of health problems. For a decision-making aid to help determine whether you should request a sleep study to identify sleep apnea, try this tool:

<https://www.healthwise.net/ohrdecisionaid/Content/StdDocument.aspx?DOCHWID=aa71651>

Conclusion

This is just an overview on the importance of sleep in wellness, and there is much more ground to cover. I strongly encourage you to consider this a starting point, and continue to look into improving your sleep. You can start with the tips above and follow with independent research on sleep. The references here are another place to start, but with little effort I'm sure you will see no lack of resources out there for working on this if you can find the motivation! Good luck and ALLOW YOURSELF TO REST!

In addition to the websites referred to above, information for this article was adapted from these sources:

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/need-sleep/whats-in-it-for-you/health>

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-29363/is-sleep-more-important-than-nutrition-exercise-mindfulness.html>

<https://www.wwdpi.org/ChronicDisease/HealthTopics/Wellness/Pages/Sleep.aspx>