

Are you getting enough sleep?



Some of you may have read about recent deaths of athletes and football players in their late 20's. We all wonder how this can happen and there does not seem to be a straightforward answer. I was recently reading about some cardiology research into the effects of the lack of sleep and there may be a clue here.

What are the main points?

Short sleep duration (<5 or 5-6 hours) increased risk for high Blood Pressure by 350% to 500% compared to those who slept longer than 6 hours per night. As you know, high BP kills.

Young people (25-49 years of age) are twice as likely to get high BP if they sleep less. Individuals who slept less than 5 hours a night had a 3-fold increased risk of heart attacks.

Complete and partial lack of sleep increased the blood concentrations of High sensitivity C-Reactive Protein (hs-CRP), the strongest predictor of heart attacks. Even after getting adequate sleep later, the levels stayed high!

Just one night of sleep loss increases very toxic substances in the body such as Interleukin-6 (IL-6), Tumour Necrosis Factor-Alpha (TNF-alpha) and C-reactive protein (CRP). They increase risks of many medical conditions, including cancer, arthritis and heart disease. Paper published in 2004.

Sleeping for <=5 hours per night leads to 39% increase in heart disease. Sleeping for <=6 hours per night leads to 18% increase in heart disease.

Ideal Sleep

Sleep is composed of two stages: REM (Rapid Eye Movement) and non-REM. The former helps in mental consolidation while the latter helps in physical repair and rebuilding. During the night, you alternate between REM and non-REM stages 4-5 times.

The earlier part of sleep is mostly non-REM. During that period, your pituitary gland releases growth hormones that repair your body. The latter part of sleep is more and more REM type.

For you to be mentally alert during the day, the latter part of sleep is more important. No wonder when you wake up with an alarm clock after 5-6 hours of sleep, you are mentally irritable throughout the day (lack of REM sleep). And if you have slept for less than 5 hours, your body is in a complete physical mess (lack of non-REM sleep), you are tired throughout the day, moving like a zombie and your immunity is way down (I've been there, done that).

If you are a sportsperson, especially a runner, you need an hour of extra sleep to repair the running related damage.

One of the athletes who died did everything right: eating proper food, exercising (running marathons), maintaining proper weight, but he missed getting proper and adequate sleep, minimum 7 hours, and that may be what killed him. If you are not getting enough sleep (7 hours), you are playing with fire, even if you have low stress.

We have all worked long hours when necessary but there is enough scientific evidence now to show that long hours, lack of sleep, too much overtime are all bad for your health and can kill you.

If any of you are over-doing it, please ease off and get your beauty sleep.

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Are You at Risk?

The prescription for staying healthy begins with knowledge about your risk factors and potential harmful habits, as well as taking the appropriate action to manage them.

Health screening by experienced medical professionals is based on the principle that early detection of key individual risk factors is crucial for improved prevention of serious illness. Medical evaluations should include an in-depth assessment of your medical history, lifestyle habits and a complete physical examination performed by trained specialists with focus on risk factors for heart disease, organ function abnormalities and cancer.

Laboratory screenings should be recommended and include tests for lipids disorders, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, anaemia, renal function, liver function, thyroid function in addition to bowel and prostate (men) cancer screening tests and any other required tests based on your medical history and condition.

Diagnostic Imaging examinations play a very large and important role in a comprehensive health screening and may include:

- CT Heart Scan - a noninvasive and fast procedure that detects any abnormality in the heart, especially the coronary arteries for calcifications and narrowings. It's the only noninvasive technique that can detect disease at an early and asymptomatic stage.
- Echocardiography - provides assessment for pre and post myocardial infarctions and valvular heart disease as well as hypertensive heart disease.
- Virtual Colonography - detects early and silent abnormalities in the colon and bowel such as polyps, diverticulitis and cancer without the need for anaesthesia or hospital recovery and has a low risk for bowel perforation. International health organisations