

The Importance of Sleep, by David A. Buczek, MA

Ever have that feeling that you don't seem to have the energy you need to get through the day? Or are there days when you just don't feel mentally sharp, or have you ever nodded off at a red light while driving your car? If you answered "Yes!" to any of these questions you probably are not alone. In fact, the symptoms above are the result of many of us not getting the amount of sleep we need to wake up refreshed and ready to face a new day.

Most of us live very busy lives. Family obligations, chores, shift work, etc. all place heavy demands on our time. In order to fit it all in, we often trade sleep for activity. In fact, statistics from the US Centers for Disease Control show that most Americans are getting by with close to six hours of sleep each night, and as a result, we end up carrying around a sleep debt that makes us feel drowsy, diminishes our mental acuity and slows our reaction times.

Everyone needs about eight hours of sleep every day to be at their best. If we get less than that amount we feel slowed down and sluggish. But, when we get the proper amount of good quality sleep each night, or when we make up for lost sleep by "sleeping in" on the weekends, we generally wake up feeling refreshed, alert and in a great mood.



And, the benefits of good sleep go far beyond just feeling better in the morning. Sleep is not just lost time, it plays an important role in our daily restoration and is critical to our ability to be *Fully Charged*. While we may not realize it, our bodies and minds are very active while we sleep. During sleep our bodies cycle through different stages of sleep. In the first portion of the night, we drop off relatively quickly into deep sleep. Our bodies are *lie very* still and restore themselves by releasing chemicals and hormones that help our muscles grow and repair tissue damage, *and t*his is also when our bodies fight off infection.

In the latter portion of the night, we experience Rapid Eye Movement, or REM sleep. This is when our brain becomes active and we dream. It is also when the brain *too* releases hormones and other chemicals that help clear and restore our brain's function. During sleep the brain also makes sense of all the information it received the day before and consolidates our memories. Sleep provides our bodies and minds the time needed to fully restore and we wake up feeling refreshed and ready to go.

If we experience fitful or disturbed sleep then we miss the opportunity to drop into deep sleep and our bodily restoration can be hampered. Studies have shown that our bodies are much less

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

effective at fighting off illness when we are sleep deprived. This nightly activity is so important to our health, that if we miss just one night of deep sleep, then the next night our bodies drop into deep sleep more quickly and we stay in deep sleep longer to make up for what was missed.

And, if we get less than the eight hours of sleep we need, we miss out on the longest periods of REM sleep during which our minds are restored to peak performance. This reduces memory consolidation and makes it harder to recall information and even skills that we were exposed to the previous day. These are the mornings when we wake up feeling sluggish, tired and weary.

The good news is that we can take action to give ourselves the sleep we need. Everyone's sleep need is slightly different. Some of us need a bit more or can get by on a bit less than the average of eight hours.

How much sleep do you need to fully restore each day? Learn how to calculate your individual sleep needs and find great tips for improving your sleep by visiting the *Fully Charged* website.

(https://my.faa.gov/org/linebusiness/ato/safety/fully_charged.html)



Did you know?

- Coffee is second only to oil as the world's largest traded commodity.
- The U.S. is the largest purchaser of coffee, consuming one-fifth of the world's production.
- The caffeine in coffee helps improve short-term alertness, but does not address the underlying sleep need.
- Grab a cup of coffee to help overcome sleepiness, but remember to get proper sleep to overcome fatigue.



Maximize Your Recuperative Break

Want to get the most out of your recuperative breaks when working the night shift? Try these steps to enhance break effectiveness and get you self back to work feeling refreshed.

- Caffeine takes about 20-30 minutes to take effect.
- Ingest caffeine before your recuperative break, then take your break as normal.
- After about 20 to 30 minutes the caffeine will begin to take effect and will help revive you after your break.

Related articles:

- [Tips for Healthy Sleep](#)

- **The Impact of Sleep on Obesity, Diabetes and Safety**