

Some Eye-Opening Statistics – America’s Sleep Habits Revealed

Research has shown that the quantity and quality of sleep we get each night has the potential to affect every aspect of our daily lives: our health; our productivity on the job; and our ability to concentrate and function while attempting even the most mundane activities. So, if sleep is so important, why do so many Americans take it for granted? By watching that extra hour of prime-time television, or staying up late to surf the net, we are putting our health (and the health of those around us) at greater risk.

How much sleep do we *really* need? The answers to this question depend on age. The average adult requires anywhere from 5 to 9 hours of sleep each night, the latter being optimum. Below five hours, one quickly becomes sleep deprived. When polled, 33% of all adults confirm that they regularly get at least 8 hours of sleep, while another 33% say they get less than 6.5. Babies and younger children need a greater amount of sleep than adults, and benefit greatly from several naps over the course of the day. The elderly, although requiring less, are often victims of poor quality sleep, and regularly suffer from insomnia.

The best advice for calculating how much sleep *you* need each night? Listen to your body! It’ll let you know without fail when it’s time to start getting more.

Getting enough sleep is one thing. Not being *able* to sleep is quite another. These days, more and more Americans are having trouble sleeping on a regular basis. The stresses of modern life, coupled with everything from mattress quality to undiagnosed medical conditions, account for some pretty startling statistics. Studies show that 60% of adults report having difficulty sleeping a few nights a week or more. In addition, 40% of adults experience daytime drowsiness severe enough to interfere with daily activities at least a few days each month.

The effects of all this poor quality sleep – whether self-inflicted or the result of a sleep disorder – are frightening. Millions of Americans struggle to stay alert at home, in school, at their jobs and on the road. A National Sleep Foundation poll conducted in 2000 found that half of all adults surveyed admit to driving drowsy. The same poll revealed that a shocking one-out-of-five adults have actually dozed off while behind the wheel! Fatigue contributes to more than 100,000 police-reported highway crashes each year, resulting in 70,000 injuries and 1,500 deaths.

There are ways to battle and win the war against poor quality sleep. Wellness experts, sleep researchers, and physicians agree that a restful night’s sleep is essential for the body to refresh and replenish itself. Below are several tips you can follow to ensure a good night’s rest, no matter what your age:

- Exercise regularly. The morning is best, but if you have to exercise at night, make sure it's a full three hours before bedtime. Otherwise, your increased heart rate might keep you from falling asleep.
- Limit your caffeine intake late in the day.
- Eat an early dinner. This ensures that digestion is complete before you turn in.
- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Routine is good for your body's internal clock.
- Choose a mattress that is both comfortable and supportive. Make sure your neck and spine remain aligned while you sleep.
- Keep your bedroom a restful place. Make it as cool, dark and comfortable as possible when you're ready to go to bed.

Practicing these simple points can go a long way in keeping your body functioning at its healthiest and most alert. Make quality, restful sleep a priority and you'll be helping to keep yourself – and anyone around you – from becoming a tragic statistic.

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