

Waking Up the Nation,
One Reader at a Time...

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

Sleepy Head? Wellness & Nutrition Challenge Series



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The purpose of the Wellness and Nutrition Challenge Series is to provide medically-based practical ideas to promote individual, family and community wellness. This series is co-written by two Naturopathic Doctors and a Registered Dietitian/ personal trainer. The suggestions offered in this series will center on small, gradual steps you can incorporate into your daily routines

to enhance your health and wellness.

The foundations of health are the basic building blocks of maintaining a healthy mind and body. The foundations include: nutrition, hydration, sleep, exercise, mental/emotional health, elimination and environmental exposures. The foundations of health are strongly interdependent and have a profound impact on how you feel and how well your body functions. This series could just as easily be called "Anti-Aging" in that when your foundations of health are strong, the aging process is slowed.

In this installment we will review the benefits of sleep, the consequences of sleep deprivation as well as tips to ensure a good

night's rest. Although science has yet to uncover all the mysteries around sleep, many critical functions have been discerned. Deep sleep increases production of growth hormone (also known as the "anti-aging" hormone) and increases destruction of free radicals in our brain. Our brain actually detoxifies when we sleep. Have you ever been short changed on a good night sleep and woken up feeling not just tired but also foggy? Sleep plays an important role in immune function (fighting infections and cancer), metabolism, learning and memory.

What happens when we are chronically sleep deprived? Research studies reveal that chronic sleep deprivation is associated with increased blood pres-

sure, impaired blood glucose, impaired mental and physical performance as well as accelerated aging of the brain. Chronic sleep deprivation is linked with many chronic conditions including autoimmune disorders, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

How much sleep is enough? General recommendations for infants are 14-15 hours per night, toddlers 12-14 hours per night, school age 10-11 hours per night and adults between 7-9 hours per night. If you are not getting enough sleep, make incremental changes to move toward getting better sleep. Small gradual changes that become part of your regular routine are more likely to be maintained. If you are having a hard

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time heading to bed at a time that ensures a good 7-9 hours, set an achievable goal of getting to bed 15 minutes earlier than usual. Each week, add another 15 minutes until you reach your ultimate goal.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, chocolate, sweets and large meals before bed. Establish a regular relaxing routine before bed and avoid using the computer or watching television in the bedroom. Exercise and exposure to natural light during the day will also help your sleep routine. Deep breathing exercises can also aid in relaxation.

If you have tried a variety of strategies and still have difficulty falling or staying asleep, it might be time to seek assistance. Effective treatment involves identifying and addressing causative factors, such as depression, anxiety, neurotransmitter or steroid hormone imbalances, mineral deficiencies or conditioned psychological arousal. There are numerous lab tests available to evaluate the underlying cause of a sleep distur-

bance.

Naturopathic doctors are experts in evaluating and treating the underlying cause of insomnia.

Naturopathic treatment strategies to correct imbalances might include GABA, taurine, glycine, 5-HTP, vitamins, minerals, adrenal support or nervines. It is especially important to address insomnia when dealing with any chronic medical condition (such as Lyme Disease, hypertension, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, etc.) as chronic sleep deprivation is a significant obstacle to healing.

Sleep is vital to your overall health. Whether you have difficulty getting to bed at a reasonable hour or just can't fall asleep, start on the path to waking up mentally and physically refreshed.

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