

If you don't snooze, you lose

GUEST COLUMN: Why sleep is crucial to good health

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Fatigue is a national epidemic.

More than 50 million Americans suffer from a sleep disorder, which can include difficulty in falling asleep, difficulty in staying asleep or early awakening, according to Dr. Donna Arand, clinical director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Kettering Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio. Arand was recently interviewed by Whole Living Magazine.

Sleep is not a luxury. An increasing body of research shows that sleep is an important component of good health.

Many people are unaware of the potentially grave health effects of inadequate amounts of sleep.

A good night's sleep can reduce your risk of developing diabetes. Scientists at the University of Buffalo found people who sleep fewer than six hours a night during the work week are more likely to have elevated levels of blood sugar than those who sleep six to eight hours, according to The Natural Solutions website.

Inadequate sleep activates the stress response, which can lead to insulin resistance.

Depriving yourself of sleep may stimulate the stress response, which could elevate your blood pressure. Researchers discovered that women who slept five hours or less nightly were twice as likely to have high blood pressure as women who snoozed for seven hours or more, according to "Take Sleep to Heart," an article published in Whole Living Magazine.

Regularly sleeping for less than seven hours per day increases the risk for cardiovascular disease, according to a study published in the August 2010 Sleep Journal. Participants in this study who reported sleeping five hours or less per day had a risk for any cardiovascular disease like heart attack, stroke, coronary heart disease and angina. That's more than two times higher than people who reported sleeping seven hours each night.

Sleepiness could be a public hazard. About one in six fatal accidents involves a drowsy driver, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports. About two out of every five drivers admit to drifting to sleep behind the wheel at some point in their lives. About 10 percent nodded off while driving within the past year.

So how much sleep do we need? Experts who contribute to the website www.sleepeducation.com, suggest that most men and women need about seven to eight hours of sleep each night.

Can you "catch up" on sleep on your days off after a sleep-deprived week of work? Not really. Sleep debt can add up and because most people can't sleep for more than 10 hours at a time. It is impossible to close the gap in one or two nights.

Researchers discovered the impairments linked to sleep-deprivation, such as lapses in attention and delayed reaction time, can remain even after a long night of recovery sleep. It may take multiple nights to find full relief from extended sleep deprivation.

Be sure sleep is a priority. Getting enough sleep will play a vital role in your health and well being. With enough daily sleep, you will enjoy the benefits of feeling alert and feeling well rested.

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