



Sleep Deprivation: Why You Should Make Sleep a Priority

For many of us, sleep is what restores us after a long active day. For those who experience trouble sleeping, the issue can become worrisome.

Most people, at some point in their lives, will experience some sort of sleep difficulties. Whether it's insomnia, racing thoughts, or [sleep apnea](#) – resolving these issues can be tedious but not impossible and vital to good health.

Why is Sleep So Important?

Sleep plays a critical role in our thinking and learning. Lack of sleep hurts our cognitive processes by impairing our attention, alertness, concentration, reasoning, and problem solving.

Lack of sleep is also a big public safety hazard every day on the road. Drowsiness can slow reaction time as much as driving drunk. The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) estimates that fatigue is a cause in 100,000 auto crashes and 1,550 crash-related deaths a year in the U.S. The problem is greatest among people under 25 years old.

Over time, lack of sleep and sleep disorders can contribute to symptoms of depression. In 2015 an American poll showed people who were diagnosed with depression or anxiety were likely to sleep less than six hours at night.

The most common sleep disorder is insomnia and it also has the strongest link to depression.

Many physicians say insomnia is often one of the first symptoms of depression. In a [2017 study from Harvard](#), out of 10,000 people, those with insomnia were five times as likely to develop depression than those without.

Chronic sleep loss can also put you at risk for heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, stroke, diabetes, irregular heartbeat and high blood pressure.



Tips to Avoid Sleep Deprivation

Below are a few tips to help you overcome sleep loss.

#1 – Avoid nicotine and caffeine.

Nicotine and caffeine are stimulants and can often wreak havoc on your sleep patterns. The effects from both can take hours to wear off. Avoid heavy meals within a couple of hours of bedtime.

#2 – Create an ideal sleeping space.

This means a quiet, dark, and cool bedroom. Discontinue screen time, including smart phones and TV, 45 minutes prior to bed. Exposure to light might make it more challenging to fall asleep. Consider using black out shades, earplugs, an overhead fan, or a white noise machine to create the perfect environment for you to snooze.

#3 – Rid yourself of worry.

Try to resolve concerns or worries before bedtime. For some, this means taking a hot bath or using stress management skills, such as mediation. If you have a big day planned, go ahead and write down what's on your mind, organize your thoughts, and list out your priorities, then set it aside for tomorrow.

#4 – Get on a sleep schedule.

Creating a sleep schedule is crucial. The recommended amount of sleep for a healthy adult is at least seven hours. Try to get up and go to bed at the same time every day. Being consistent reinforces your body's sleep cycle.

#5 – Get moving!

Regular physical activity can promote better sleep.

Pulmonology & Sleep Medicine at WakeMed

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About Emily Medlin

Emily Medlin is an Education Specialist and a Board Certified Health Coach with WakeMed Corporate and Community Health.