

Tailored Approach to Sleep Health Education Materials—Sleep Health

The following intervention materials, which explain why sleep is important for overall good health, were developed by faculty in NYU Langone’s Department of Population Health as part of their Tailored Approach to Sleep Health Education study.

Why Sleep?

Sleep is a major part of your health and well-being. It is important to help your body work properly. Getting 7-8 hours of good restful sleep, as recommended by the National Sleep Foundation (see: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need>), will improve your health, wellness, and daily performance, and will help you feel better and have greater overall quality of life.

What Are the Stages of Sleep?

There are two stages of sleep: Rapid Eye Movement (REM) and Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM). NREM can be broken down into 3 stages: Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3. Stage 3 is usually described as “deep” sleep. In Stage 3, it is hard to wake people. Most people spend more time in the NREM stage and then move to the REM stage. People have about 2-3 cycles of these stages throughout the night. REM is the time when most people have dreams. Dreams starts to produce once a person enters REM sleep.

There are “master clocks” in the brain that set our systems for different functions throughout the body called circadian rhythms. The circadian rhythm determines your sleep patterns and usually follows a 24-hour schedule. One of the main cues for controlling sleep is light from the sun or from your home.

How Much Sleep Do I Need?

Most adults, including those who are over the age of 50, need about 7-8 hours of sleep each night. Research shows that some Black people do not get enough sleep. This is not fully understood but may be due to lack of awareness about the importance of sleep.

What Can Happen If You Don’t Get Enough Sleep?

- You may feel tired during the day and have trouble staying awake.
- You may feel irritable and fatigued.
- You may forget things.
- You may feel down or sad.
- You may get into a car accident or get injured.
- You may get sick.
- You may become less productive and miss more days at work.

- You may have major health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.
- You may gain weight or have trouble losing weight.

This may be why many studies have shown that people who don't get enough sleep tend not to live as long as those who sleep 7-8 hours.

What Is Insufficient Sleep?

People of all ages say they don't get enough sleep or restful sleep. As part of a health survey for the CDC, about 7–19 percent of adults in the U.S. say they don't get enough rest or sleep every day. Insufficient sleep refers to getting less than 7 hours of sleep and is linked to many health problems, like heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression.

Insufficient sleep is also linked with an increased risk of car accidents and injuries on the job. In the elderly, insufficient sleep might be linked to an increased risk of falls and broken bones. A common myth is that people can learn to get by on little sleep without any problems. However, research shows that getting enough restful sleep is needed for mental health, physical health, well-being, and safety. Talk to your doctor if you are having trouble getting enough sleep.

What Happens If You Get Too Much Sleep?

It is rare that people get too much sleep. It may be that some people are long sleepers. Getting too much sleep may be linked to health problems and poor sleep quality. Research shows that some Black people get too much sleep.

What Can You Do to Improve Sleep?

There are things that you can do to help you get a good night sleep. You may also want to talk to your doctor about your sleep.

Your goal is to find the best bedtime sleep routine that works for you. If you continue to have problems with sleep, you should talk to your doctor.

Tips for Better Sleep

- Keep your sleep schedule the same. This means going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time, even on weekends.
- Get plenty of bright light during the day. The “master clock” in the brain gets its cues from light to determine when we are asleep and when we are awake.
- Go outside in the morning. Get bright light in the morning especially from the sun, to help you sleep better.

- Avoid bright light at night. This includes light from your computer, television, smart-phone, close to bedtime
- Avoid caffeine close to bedtime. This includes from coffee, tea, soda, or energy drinks, close to bedtime. Caffeine can make it hard to sleep for 6 hours or longer after drinking it.
- Avoid nicotine. Nicotine is the drug in cigarettes. Nicotine can make it hard to fall asleep.
- Avoid alcohol near bedtime. More than 1-2 drinks close to bedtime may make it harder to stay asleep.
- Watch what you eat for dinner. Too much food, or heavy or spicy food, before bedtime might make getting to sleep or staying to sleep harder.
- Keep your sleeping room temperature cool, between 60-70 degrees. If it's too cold, wear warm socks and use extra blankets to keep warm. If it's too hot, wear lighter clothes and use a fan to cool off.
- Limit naps. If you take naps, only nap during the afternoon and keep the nap to 20 minutes or less. Too much napping could make it harder to fall asleep at night.
- Stay as physically active as possible during the day.
- Keep your bed for sleep and sex only. Don't watch TV or doing other activities in bed that may make it harder to sleep.
- Talk to your doctor before taking over the counter sleep medications. These medications have side effects, and you might have other issues that could be made worse by medication.