

Sleep – let's make time for it

Sleep is as important as a balanced diet and regular exercise in keeping us physically and mentally healthy, yet one third of us don't get enough. That makes one-third of us irritable, forgetful, less productive and more susceptible to illness, as well as having an increased risk of obesity and chronic health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and depression.

Take our quiz to find out if you are making sleep a priority.

1. How many hours of uninterrupted sleep do adults require each day?

- a) Four to six
- b) Seven to nine
- c) Ten to twelve

Answer: b). According to the National Sleep Foundation, adults (18-64) require seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

2. The older we get, the less sleep we need.

- True
- False

Answer: False. Our need for sleep remains more or less the same throughout adulthood although our sleeping patterns do change as we age – we wake more easily and spend more time in light sleep.

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3. Which of the following are signs you're not getting enough sleep?

- a) Forgetfulness
- b) Inability to focus
- c) Weight gain
- d) All of the above

Answer: d). If you experience persistent sleep problems, consult your doctor.

4. During sleep your brain rests.

- True
- False

Answer: False. Your body is resting and restoring but your brain remains active. Much of that activity involves learning and remembering.

5. Reading in bed is a great way to prepare for sleep.

- True
- False

Answer: False. Reading, watching TV or using electronic devices in bed stimulates your brain.

6. A nightcap helps you relax before bed.

- True
- False

Answer: False. Alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but it worsens the quality of your sleep.

7. Snoring is nothing to worry about.

- True
- False

Answer: False. Persistent loud snoring at night and daytime sleepiness are the main symptoms of a common yet serious sleep disorder — sleep apnea. Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns.

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8. What are the causes of sleep problems?

- a) Sleep disorders
- b) Stress and anxiety
- c) Electric light
- d) All of the above

Answer: d). If you experience persistent sleep problems, consult your doctor.

How did you do? Do you think you need help making sleep a priority?

Here are some tips that can help make a difference in improving your sleeping patterns:

- Stick to a schedule. Go to bed and get up around the same time every day – including weekends.
- Ditch the electronic devices at least an hour before going to bed. Connecting to social media, playing video games, responding to emails or watching TV stimulates the brain, making it harder for us to fall asleep. In addition, exposure to the blue light that our devices emit suppresses our melatonin levels – a chemical that helps us sleep.
- Create a cool, quiet and comfortable sleeping environment. Invest in a good mattress and pillows and keep the room temperature comfortable.
- Try not to nap. Napping disrupts your sleep-wake cycle. If you must nap, limit it to 10 to 20 minutes.
- Don't eat a heavy or spicy meal or a sugary snack before going to sleep.
- Exercise regularly but not too close to bedtime.
- Cut down on or avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, soft drinks) six to eight hours before going to bed. Caffeine is a stimulant that stays in the body for several hours – up to 12 hours for some people.
- Dim and/or reduce the lights in your home as bedtime nears. Artificial light tricks our brains into thinking it's daylight and therefore not time to sleep.
- Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.

Our busy, and often stressful, lifestyles can make getting enough sleep difficult. In order to build better resilience skills we need to make restful, restorative sleep a priority.

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Healthy eating for busy families

Eating healthy can be challenging and overwhelming, especially when trying to balance work, family needs, and a social life. While it might seem easier to go to the nearest drive-through or buy packaged and pre-made foods, these types of food are often filled with added sugars and trans fats. However, there are some easy lifestyle adjustments that can make healthy meals and snacks just as easy of an option.

Pick your recipes first

Pick one day of the week or every other week, when you know you will have a few hours free to choose recipes to make, go grocery shopping, and then “meal-prep”.

Start by selecting three or four recipes that are simple and will last the week; this should take no more than 15 minutes. When choosing recipes, try and pick those that have at least two vegetables included. Pinterest and Foodgawker.com are excellent resources for finding recipes. There are thousands of different recipes available and the search function makes it easy to find options to suit all dietary needs.

Here are a few easy meal and snack ideas that can get you started:

- Slow cooker soup, stews, chili
- One pan roasted vegetables and protein (chicken or fish)
- Hard boiled eggs
- Stir-fry
- Vegetables and hummus

Once you have the recipes, it can be beneficial to write out your weekly meals using a planner.

Shop for your ingredients next

Based on the recipes chosen, make a list of groceries you will need and head to the store. Having a grocery list will ensure you only buy what you need, and prevent you from wasting time aimlessly wandering. This will save you money and time.

A good rule of thumb when grocery shopping is to shop the perimeter of the store. The perimeter is where you will find fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, fish, and eggs are located. To help speed up your meal preparation at home, you might want to opt for pre-cut fruits and vegetables. Most grocery stores have produce such as squash, sweet potatoes, parsnips, broccoli, cauliflower and melons already chopped. Some stores also carry peeled garlic, riced cauliflower, microwave ready green beans, and frozen chopped onions. Stocking your freezer with frozen fruits and vegetables can also be a time saver for those weeks when you don't have the time to get to the grocery store.

Time to cook!

Now, you can begin preparing the foods you will need to make your recipes. Chop any fruits and vegetables that were not pre-cut, steam or roast these, and cook grains like rice or quinoa. This will speed up the cooking process when you want to make meals for your family. Consider doubling the recipe so that you will have leftovers, which can then be packed for lunch or eaten as dinner another day of the week.

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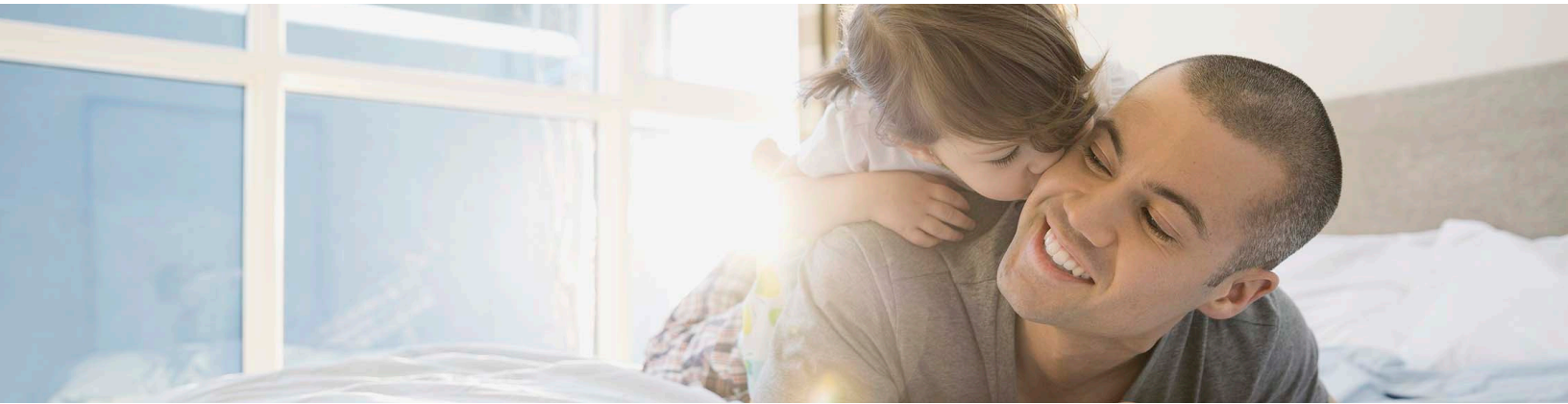
Read the ingredient list

For those times when you will not be able to meal plan for the week, make sure you read the ingredient list on pre-prepared products. You should be able to pronounce everything on the list, and have a general idea of what each ingredient is. Try and avoid added sugars and steer clear of anything with trans fats.

Make it a family affair

Making healthy choices for you and your family requires some time and planning, but involving the whole family can make the process less daunting. Get creative with the meals, have your kids help pick the recipes and get them involved in the grocery shopping and cooking process. This way it can become a fun family activity!

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