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Why Do We Need Sleep?

We tend to think of sleep as a time when the mind and body shut down. But this is not the case; sleep is an active period in which a lot of important processing, restoration, and strengthening occurs. Exactly how this happens and why our bodies are programmed for such a long period of slumber is still somewhat of a mystery. But scientists do understand some of sleep's critical functions, and the reasons we need it for optimal health and wellbeing.

One of the vital roles of sleep is **to help us solidify and consolidate memories**. As we go about our day, our brains take in an incredible amount of information. Rather than being directly logged and recorded, however, these facts and experiences first need to be processed and stored; and many of these steps happen while we sleep. Overnight, bits and pieces of information are transferred from more tentative, short-term memory to stronger, long-term memory—a process called "consolidation." Researchers have also shown that after people sleep, they tend to retain information and perform better on memory tasks. **Our bodies all require long periods of sleep in order to restore and rejuvenate, to grow muscle, repair tissue, and synthesize hormones.**

[How Much Sleep Do We Really Need?](http://sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need)

Healthy sleep is critical for everyone, since we all need to retain information and learn skills to thrive in life. But this is likely part of the reason children—who acquire language, social, and motor skills at a breathtaking pace throughout their development—need more sleep than adults. While adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night, one-year-olds need roughly 11 to 14 hours, **school age children between 9 and 11, and teenagers between 8 and 10.**During these critical periods of growth and learning, younger people need a heavy dose of **slumber for optimal development and alertness.**

Unfortunately, a person can't just accumulate sleep deprivation and then log many hours of sleep to make up for it (although paying back "sleep debt" is always a good idea if you're sleep deprived). **The best sleep habits are consistent**, **healthy routines** that allow all of us, regardless of our age, to meet our sleep needs every night, and keep on top of life's challenges every day.

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Sleep is a vital indicator of overall health and well-being. **We spend up to one-third of our lives asleep**, and the overall state of our "sleep health" remains an essential question throughout our lifespan. Most of us know that getting...

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[**How Excessive Sleep Can Affect Your Metabolism**](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-excessive-sleep-can-affect-your-metabolism)

Few people worry about spending too much time in bed. An extra hour or two of stolen sleep on Sunday can feel like heaven after a long week of work and family activities. But did you know that **clocking more than the recommended amount can negatively impact your health**? For most adults, getting between seven and nine hours of sleep...

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**For teenagers, sleep plays a critical role in staying healthy, feeling happy, maintaining good grades, and doing well in sports....**

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A missed night of sleep is a fairly common experience for young people, new parents, and all kinds of busy...

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[How Your Body Uses Calories While You Sleep](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-your-body-uses-calories-while-you-sleep)

Burning calories is a term most often associated with aerobic exercise and physically taxing jobs. But actually, you don’t need...

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Nightmares and night terrors are both scary and can cause sleep disturbances, but they are not the same thing. Knowing...

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[Night Terrors: When to Talk with a Doctor](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/night-terrors-when-talk-doctor)

Your child’s first night terror is disconcerting to say the least. It likely involves screaming and flailing about while asleep,...

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[Pain and Sleep](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/pain-and-sleep)

Is pain keeping you awake? Find out why pain affects sleep and what you can do to sleep better.

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Great news: more than three-fourths (76%) of those surveyed say that they had a good night’s sleep at least a...

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When it comes to your health, sleep plays an important role. While more sleep won’t necessarily prevent you from getting...

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