



Healthy Choices

Don't Cheat Yourself

BY WINSTON CRAIG

Too many Americans are shortchanging themselves on sleep to spend more time at work, at play, or chatting on the Internet. On an average week day, Americans get six to seven hours of sleep per night, while research suggests we need at least eight hours. Lack of sleep affects our ability to judge accurately, and puts at risk our productivity, safety, and health.

Lack of sleep can have disastrous consequences on the health of children. Sleep-deprived kids often develop emotional problems. Their academic achievements may also suffer. Deep sleep triggers the release of growth hormone which stimulates bone and muscle development. Hence, a lack of sleep can impair the proper growth of a child. Children with chronic sleep deficits often have a shortened attention span and are irritable and impatient. Such kids may have a hard time making friends.

Tips for getting adequate rest:

- 1. Have regular hours for bedtime each night.*
- 2. Don't allow computers, TV, and food in the bedroom.*
- 3. Make the bedroom a quiet, dark place conducive to sound sleeping.*
- 4. Avoid late evening meals and intense mental work just before retiring to bed.*
- 5. Recharge your batteries with an annual family vacation to some favorite destination.*

Research shows that sleep-deprived people increase their caloric consumption by as much as 15 percent, while their performance on certain tests is significantly worse than after one to two alcoholic drinks. Chronic loss of sleep may increase the risk of diabetes, since the insulin secretion can be impaired by up to 30 percent. Sleep deprivation also contributes to mental depression, increases the risk of colds and infections, and decreases the ability to handle stress. Sleep debt has a harmful effect on hormone function similar to that seen in normal aging.

Sleep resettles us emotionally, cognitively, and immunologically. Sleep is a time of renewal and restoration. Christ suggested we need adequate periods of rest (Mark 6:31) which are essential to the health of body and mind (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7, p. 247).

*Winston J. Craig, Ph.D., R.D., Andrews University
professor of nutrition*

