

Q. How much sleep do I really need to be healthy?

A. Studies show that most adults need to sleep an average of 7 to 8 hours a night for best health.

But that's not always easy to do. Your hours of available sleeping time can be cut short if you stay up late to watch TV or spend time online, work a lot of overtime hours, care for young children, or have trouble falling asleep. About 20 percent of Americans get less than 6 hours of sleep on average. And that's a problem if you want to live a long and healthy life.

In a 10-year study, researchers tracked the sleep habits of 6,000 people. They found that those who slept 7 to 8 hours every day lived significantly longer than those who got less sleep. In another study, researchers found that those who got at least 7 hours of sleep every day lived the longest. Those getting less than 6 hours a day had the greatest increase risk. They also found that longevity decreased for people who slept 9 or more hours a night.

An estimated 30 million Americans don't get enough sleep. And it may be one reason why chronic diseases are the top cause of death and disability in the United States. Lack of sleep increases your risk for diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and depression. Studies also show that sleeping less than 7 to 8 hours a night can



weaken your immune system and contribute to memory loss, accidents, and mood disorders.

But those statistics shouldn't keep you awake at night. Most people can make simple lifestyle changes to sleep 7 to 8 hours a night. For your overall health, follow these tips to get a good night's sleep:

- ✓ Go to bed at the same time every night.
- ✓ Relax or take a hot bath before bedtime.
- ✓ Create a comfortable sleep environment.
- ✓ Don't eat a large meal or drink a lot of liquids late at night.
- ✓ Exercise no later than a few hours before bedtime.
- ✓ If you take a nap, get your extra zzzs mid-morning or early afternoon and no later.
- ✓ Don't drink alcohol
- ✓ Avoid caffeine and nicotine

- ✓ See your doctor if sleeplessness continues to be a problem.

American Cancer Society.

Journal of the American Medical Association.

Harvard School of Public Health.

