

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Sleep Problems ?”

We sleep for 1/3 of our lifetimes and still don't know exactly what for. Studies have shown that 40% of Americans are sleep deprived and get less than 5 hours of sleep per night. Sleep and rest is recommended for recovery from many forms of illness. All mammals and birds sleep. Insects appear to sleep, too. And, people who cannot sleep, die. Rats die after about 17 days of total sleep deprivation. One of the first things to change after 1 week of sleep deprivation in rats is an increase in food consumption and a drop in body temperature, even as the rats attempt to keep themselves warmer. In humans, one of the first things to happen, even after a single night of sleep deprivation, is a subjective feeling of cold. Insomnia or sleep deprivation may be a risk factor for cancer, arteriosclerosis, diabetes, arthritis and cataracts. Insufficient sleep has been linked to a wide variety of health problems, including pain, heart disease and cancer. Previous research has highlighted the potential health risks of shift work. Working the graveyard shift upped a woman's risk of developing breast cancer by 60%, suggesting women with a family history of breast cancer may be wise to avoid shift work. According to a 2007 British study, people who do not get enough sleep are more than twice as likely to die of heart disease. A 17-year analysis of 10,000 government workers showed those who cut their sleeping from seven hours a night to five or less, faced a 1.7-fold increased risk in mortality from all causes and more than doubled the risk of cardiovascular death. Some believe that napping at work can help prevent heart disease. Researchers followed 23,681 healthy Greek adults for six years. Those who napped at least three times per week at the office, for at least 30 minutes, had a 37% lower chance of dying from heart attacks or heart disease than those who managed to stay awake through their entire workday. Getting less than seven hours of sleep increases the risk of weight gain and less than six hours leads to unclear thinking. Men who had a sleep disorder were over 2 times at risk of a heart attack and up to 4 times at risk of a stroke. Avoid caffeine for several hours before retiring, as it can stay in your system for 12 hours.

In the America that I love, the importance of adequate sleep has been widely ignored, other than with sleep apnea. Lack of sleep is directly associated with accidents and irritability. So, recharge and repair your body with adequate sleep. Sleeping around seven to eight hours per night appears to be optimal for health.

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