

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Sleep Adequacy is Key”

According to the National Sleep Foundation, many as one third of Americans still don't get enough sleep. A lot of people still believe a lot of common myths when it comes to getting shuteye. An estimated 50% of Americans watch television 30 minutes before going to bed. But this pre-sleep arousal has been shown to lead to sleep difficulties. We sleep for 1/3 of our lifetimes or about 24.9 years. 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. 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. According to a 2007 British study, people who do not get enough sleep are more than twice as likely to die of heart disease. Getting less than seven hours of sleep increases the risk of weight gain and less than six hours leads to unclear thinking. People who have sleep apnea are at higher risk for motor vehicle accidents. Night-shift workers—who typically get less sleep and have lower sleep quality than day workers—are at higher risk for depression, diabetes, breast cancer, and all-cause mortality. Instead of getting more sleep, older adults actually tend to sleep less, in part due to health conditions. Habitual insufficient sleep can lead to metabolic, mental health, and immunological health consequences. Researchers have shown no adverse effect of nighttime exercise on sleep. In fact, exercise and sleep can be mutually beneficial. Although we need extra sleep when recovering from sleep loss or while otherwise healing, the jury is still out on the effects of long sleep times on health and mortality. Also, people with insomnia shouldn't try to compensate for less sleep by staying in bed longer. In fact, cutting back on time in bed is one of the most effective treatments for insomnia. The effects of one night of sleep deprivation are short-term, such as lapses in attention and other cognitive difficulties, as well as increased blood pressure. Cognitive and physiological performance returns to normal following sleep recovery. Hot and stuffy bedrooms are linked to worse sleep. Instead, a bedroom temperature of 65-70° F is recommended for best sleep. The brain remains active during sleep. Sleep is characterized by periods of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep activity, which includes eye movement, rapid firing of neurons, and loss of muscle tone. During sleep, neurotoxic waste is cleared from the brain, thus making sleep restorative.

In the America that I love, sleeping around seven to eight hours per night appears to be optimal for health.

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