

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Five Reasons You Always Feel Tired”

Do you walk around feeling like a zombie? If so, this might be the reasons. 1) Poor sleep quality. We sleep for 1/3 of our lifetimes (about 24.9 years). 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. Insufficient sleep is also the primary reason for always feeling tired. 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. Hot and stuffy bedrooms are linked to poor 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. Seven to 8 hours of sleep are useless if those hours are of poor quality. This could be why you're always tired. Maybe you have a partner who snores, or a pet who needs to be on top of you in order to feel secure in the night. If you're waking up repeatedly, you might not be getting the restorative sleep that you need. 2) Stress. Every time stressful situations arise; your amygdala pumps out epinephrine and norepinephrine depending on perceived needs. That can get pretty taxing and could be why you're always tired. Stress is related to countless illnesses and feeling fatigued or over-tired is clearly one of them. 3) Too many carbohydrates. Fast-burning carbs provide use with quick hits of energy, prompting spikes in insulin to transfer glucose into our cells. We get a short energetic lift, and a precipitous crash follows that leaves us craving more carbs. The American diet is very carb-heavy, and in some ways, it creates a vicious cycle which repeats itself. Slower-digesting macronutrients, such as fats and proteins, provide more stable sources of energy. 4) Sedentary lifestyle. Chronic fatigue syndrome, (CFS), appears to be linked to sedentary living. People with CFS tended to be less active and have less isometric muscle strength and CFS patients who exercise feel less fatigued. And 5) Caffeine. Many overuse coffee to fight chronic fatigue but its effect soon wear off and you feel more tired than before. This is called rebound fatigue. Energy-drink consumers experienced increase daytime sleepiness the day after.

In the America that I love, restful sleep is absolutely essential.

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