

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Sleep Linked to Good Mental Health”

We sleep for 1/3 of our lifetimes or about 24.9 years. People who cannot sleep, die. Rats die after about 17 days of total sleep deprivation. A new study, published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, found that future lifestyle interventions targeting sleep quality may be most beneficial at improving mental health and wellbeing. Young adults should prioritize getting good quality sleep, but they also stress the importance of eating well and exercising often since “physical activity and diet” are secondary but still significant factors. The study ranked sleep, physical activity and diet as influencers of good mental health. Sleep, physical activity, and a healthy diet can be thought of as three pillars of health, which could contribute to promoting optimal well-being among young adults. Sleep quality outranked them all as the strongest predictor of good mental health. People who slept close to 10 hours per night reported fewer depressive symptoms, but not enough (<8 h) or too much sleep (>12 h) had people reporting more symptoms of depression. Eating moderate servings of raw fruit and veggies each day also correlated with better wellbeing. Some previous research suggests healthy behaviors such as eating well or exercising often can have a synergistic effect on wellbeing. Researchers have shown no adverse effect of nighttime exercise on sleep. In fact, exercise and sleep can be mutually beneficial. Disrupted sleep has been linked to poor mental health before, including depression and other mood disorders. Eating a well-rounded diet has also been shown to help prevent depression, and even short bouts of exercise can boost your mental and physical health. 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. 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. Habitual insufficient sleep can lead to metabolic, mental health, and immunological health consequences. Instead of getting more sleep, older adults actually tend to sleep less, in part due to health conditions. Hot and stuffy bedrooms are linked to worse sleep. Instead, a bedroom temperature of 65-70° F is recommended for best sleep. Sleep clears the brain’s neurotoxic waste.

In the America that I love, sleeping around seven to eight hours per night appears to be optimal for general overall health. Sleep quality may actually be the most important factor predicting good mental health, more so than hours slept, physical activity, and diet.

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