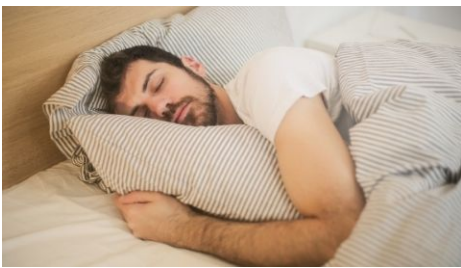


How Important is Sleep to Mental Health

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How Important is Sleep to Mental Health?

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March 14 to 20th is Sleep Awareness Week. While many people know how important quality sleep is to our physical health, it is just as important to our mental health and wellbeing. People used to think that sleep problems were the result of mental health struggles and stress. But it is now recognized that the relationship goes both ways. It is bidirectional. Stress can cause sleep disruption, but poor sleep can also cause stress and mental health challenges.

About ¾ of people with depression also report sleep disturbances, but the question of cause and effect is still being debated. We know that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) disrupts sleep, but poor sleep also exacerbates symptoms of anxiety. Poor sleep can make PTSD and all other anxiety disorders worse. Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other mental health concerns can all be exacerbated by poor sleep.

To boost mental health and wellbeing, give some attention to your sleep routine. Some recommended sleep hygiene practices include:

- **Create an environment that's peaceful and relaxing.** That could mean using darker curtains or blinds, changing your pillow or blanket, or using a fan for noise. Everyone is different. Find out what environment works best for you. Remember to listen to your body!

- **Keep a consistent sleep schedule.** Try to wake at the same time each day regardless of how much sleep you actually got.
- **Limit napping to 30 minutes or less per day.**
- **Develop a bedtime routine.** This could mean listening to music, writing, or reading a book. For some people, reading is not a good habit at bedtime. Find something that makes *you* sleepy and stick to it.
- **Relax your mind before bed.** If you have a hard time quieting your mind at bedtime, keep a notepad by the bed to jot down your thoughts and set them aside until the next day.
- **Exercise**, but try to avoid it within a couple hours of bedtime.

When people feel rested they are less likely to experience negative thoughts or a bad mood. They feel more in control of their lives, which leads to less anxiety and stress. A well-rested body and brain makes people more alert and less accident prone, and that means fewer adverse events to ruin your day.

If you are convinced that sleep is important, here is a quick self-check to see how well you are doing on sleep.

Set a timer for 3-5 minutes. Then get comfortable in a seated position and close your eyes, relax, and practice some comfortable deep breathing. If the timer startles you awake, you know you aren't getting enough quality sleep. If five minutes of deep breathing leaves you feeling groggy, you may be slightly sleep-deprived. However, if you can emerge from 5 minutes of deep breathing feeling relaxed and refreshed with increased alertness, you may have your sleep needs under control.

It is important to know how critical sleep is to mental health. While the sleep hygiene suggestions above are based in science, some sleep issues require professional help. If sleep is a constant struggle, talk to your medical provider. Your mental health may depend upon it.

Learn more about Sleep Awareness Week and other ideas to help you get the sleep you need, here: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/press-release/sleep-awareness-week-2020>

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