

Sleep Necessities

The magic 'drug' that keeps you happy, makes you skinnier and helps you be a better you

BY PEGGY J. NOONAN

Sleep. It's as important to our overall health as diet and fitness but most of us take it for granted. In fact, it's tempting to skimp on sleep when we're short on time and long on to-do tasks. We stay up late, wake up early and try to fit just one more thing into our day. And while that may be OK once in a while, we're setting ourselves up for major health problems if we make it a habit.

Until recently, experts thought nothing much happened while we slept, but we're now learning that sleep actually plays an important role in our physical and mental health.

Research has found that insufficient sleep is linked to a broad range of health problems, including diabetes, obesity, depression, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases, a weakened immune system, even shorter life expectancy. It has been shown to lower the potency of vaccines and has the same effect on grade point average as binge drinking and marijuana use in college students. »



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a lot of physiological problems,” Rosenberg says. What about people who claim to be fine on just three or four hours of sleep a night (and imply the rest of us are slugs who sleep away the hours)? Rosenberg says studies show that no more than 1 percent to 2 percent of people have the “genetic determination” that allows them to need less sleep. The rest of us must have at least six hours or more. His advice: “Budget time to get a good seven to nine hours of sleep a night.”

Naps not enough

And don't rely on naps to accumulate your daily total. “That's not good enough,” Rosenberg says. You may get your target hours, but fragmented sleep can disrupt your circadian cycle, the body clock's natural cycle of sleepiness and wakefulness.

When people lose their circadian timing, they're “miserable,” Rosenberg says. They're up when everyone else is asleep and asleep when everyone else is up. It's difficult to live a normal life when “they're sleeping like a baby, two hours here, three hours there, then they're up for two.”

If you're tired in the afternoon and need a pick-me-up, aim for a short (20 to 30 minutes) nap, as longer naps can cut into that night's sleep.

And don't try to make up for lost sleep on the weekend, Wainer says. While taking a nap or going to bed early and getting up later once in a while can be fine, it can lead to trouble if you do it consistently.

Good sleep habits regulate mood, improve concentration and decision-making skills and help people engage in work and social activities, says Larisa R. Wainer, a sleep disorder specialist with the Morris Psychological Group in Parsippany, N.J. “Even one night of sleep deprivation can cause a significant increase in symptoms of anxiety (and) depression in people who don't have other mental health issues,” she says.

Got enough ZZZs?

So how much sleep do we really need?

For most adults, the target is seven to nine hours each night. People who sleep fewer than six hours a night have “a very high incidence” of health problems such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity, says Dr. Robert S. Rosenberg, a sleep medicine specialist at the Sleep Disorders Center of Prescott Valley, Ariz. “Six hours seems to be the ‘break point’ for



The Disease Link

OBESITY

Less sleep can cause obesity because it triggers an appetite-stimulating hormone that causes people to want to eat more when they're awake.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

One study suggests there may be a relationship between sleep and multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disease that affects two to three times more women than men. MS destroys myelin, the protective sheath that insulates nerves and lets them function normally. Researchers found that rats produce twice as much myelin during REM sleep, the dream stage, than at any other time of day.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

“Sleep helps you clean the brain,” says Dr. Robert S. Rosenberg, a sleep medicine specialist. Recent studies showed the brain's glymphatic system, nicknamed the brain's garbage truck, increases flow about tenfold during sleep to wash out beta amyloid, one of the building blocks of Alzheimer's disease.

1

Use bedtime routines. Create a healthy sleep routine and stick to it. You'll fall asleep easier and sleep better if you go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.

2 **Create a restful environment.** Keep your bedroom cool, quiet and dark to help your body's natural sleep mechanisms. Turn off electronics at least an hour before sleep time. If you can't quit texting and tweeting that early, at least dim the screen, advises Larisa R. Wainer, a sleep specialist with the Morris Psychological Group in Parsippany, N.J.

3 **Learn and practice relaxation techniques.** If you have trouble winding down mentally and physically after a busy day, try relaxation techniques until you find one you like and will use. Anxieties and worries that you were too busy to address during the day may break through at bedtime. Don't dwell on them, Wainer says. Use your relaxation techniques to dim their volume so you can get a restful sleep tonight to help you function better tomorrow.



4

Don't try to catch up. If you have a shortened sleep night, don't try to make up for lost time by napping, going to bed earlier when you're not sleepy or sleeping in later. Resume your normal schedule.

5

Avoid sleep medicines. They may help short term but they're not for long-term use. People build tolerance to the drugs, Wainer says, which can add to the problem by causing “daytime sleepiness, cognitive impairment and rebound insomnia” when you stop taking them.

7

Keep the bedroom a sleep-friendly space. If you don't fall asleep in 15 or 20 minutes, don't let anxieties build. That can create negative sleep habits. Instead, get up, go into another room and do something calming (read, listen to relaxing music) until you wind down enough to try again. Use the bedroom solely for sleep or sex.

6

Skip caffeine and alcohol. Even a small amount of caffeine, a stimulant, can keep some from falling asleep and disrupt rest when you need to urinate during the night. Alcohol, a depressant, can increase sleep breathing problems such as snoring. Though it may help some people fall asleep at first, it also makes it harder to get back to sleep if you wake up early.



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When tired's not normal

If you're getting enough sleep at night, "you should not be tired" or feel run down, says Wainer. If you don't feel as rested as you should, you may need to see your primary health care provider.

The problem could be something simple, such as a medication that's keeping you awake. Or it could be a sleep disorder, something such as sleep apnea or insomnia. If your primary care provider doesn't take a good sleep history or just puts you on a sleep medication, "you probably should go somewhere else," Rosenberg says.

Keep a sleep diary or log for at least one week to track what time you went to sleep, when you woke up, how long it took to fall asleep, how many hours you slept, whether you napped during the day, consumed caffeine or alcohol, and so on. A log is much more accurate than

WISH YOU COULD GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP?

You're not alone. Although Americans slept eight hours and 44 minutes per day on average in 2013, approximately 70 million — more than one in five of us — suffer from chronic sleep problems, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

memory, Rosenberg says, and will be "of the utmost importance" in helping your primary provider or sleep specialist determine what's going on.

"Sleep health, especially for women, needs greater attention," says Christine Carter, vice president of scientific affairs for the Society for Women's Health Research.

We need to know more about the various biological, environmental and social factors that cause men and women to sleep differently, Carter adds, "so we can tailor better lifestyle recommendations and medical treatments to account for those differences." ●

Dear Diary

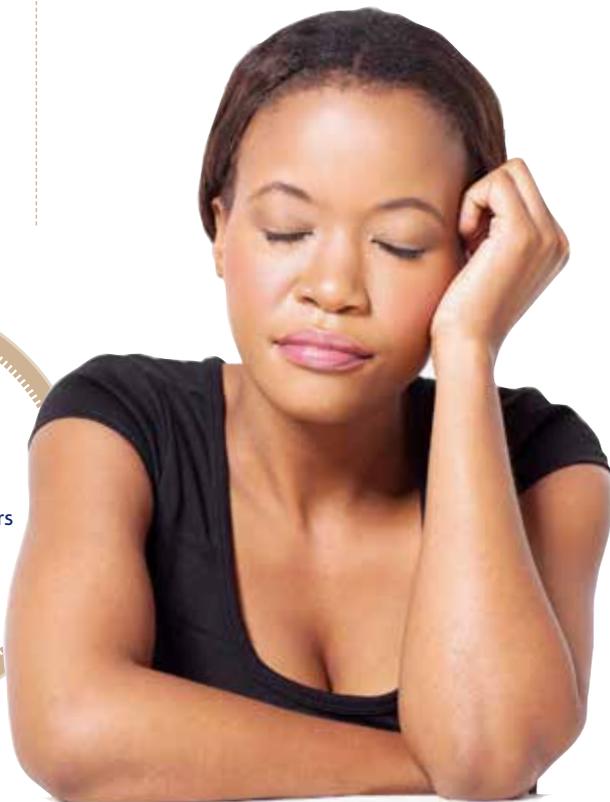
A sleep diary can help pinpoint causes of sleep problems, and they're easy to do.

Simply write down the times you went to sleep and woke up, any hours you slept during the day and whether you exercised, consumed caffeine or alcohol or took medications that may have affected your sleep.

Keep a sleep diary or log for at least one week. Then take your sleep log along when you consult your primary provider or sleep medicine specialist, a doctor who has received additional training in sleep, sleep disorders and sleep-related conditions.

Download examples of sleep diaries at these websites:

- ▶ **American Academy of Sleep Medicine**
yoursleep.aasmnet.org/pdf/sleepdiary.pdf
- ▶ **National Sleep Foundation Sleep Diary**
http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-diary/SleepDiaryv6.pdf
- ▶ **National Sleep Foundation Sleep Log**
sleepfoundation.org/sample-sleep-log
- ▶ **The Sleep Diary from Dr. Robert S. Rosenberg**
answersforsleep.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Sleep-Diary-2014jul25.pdf



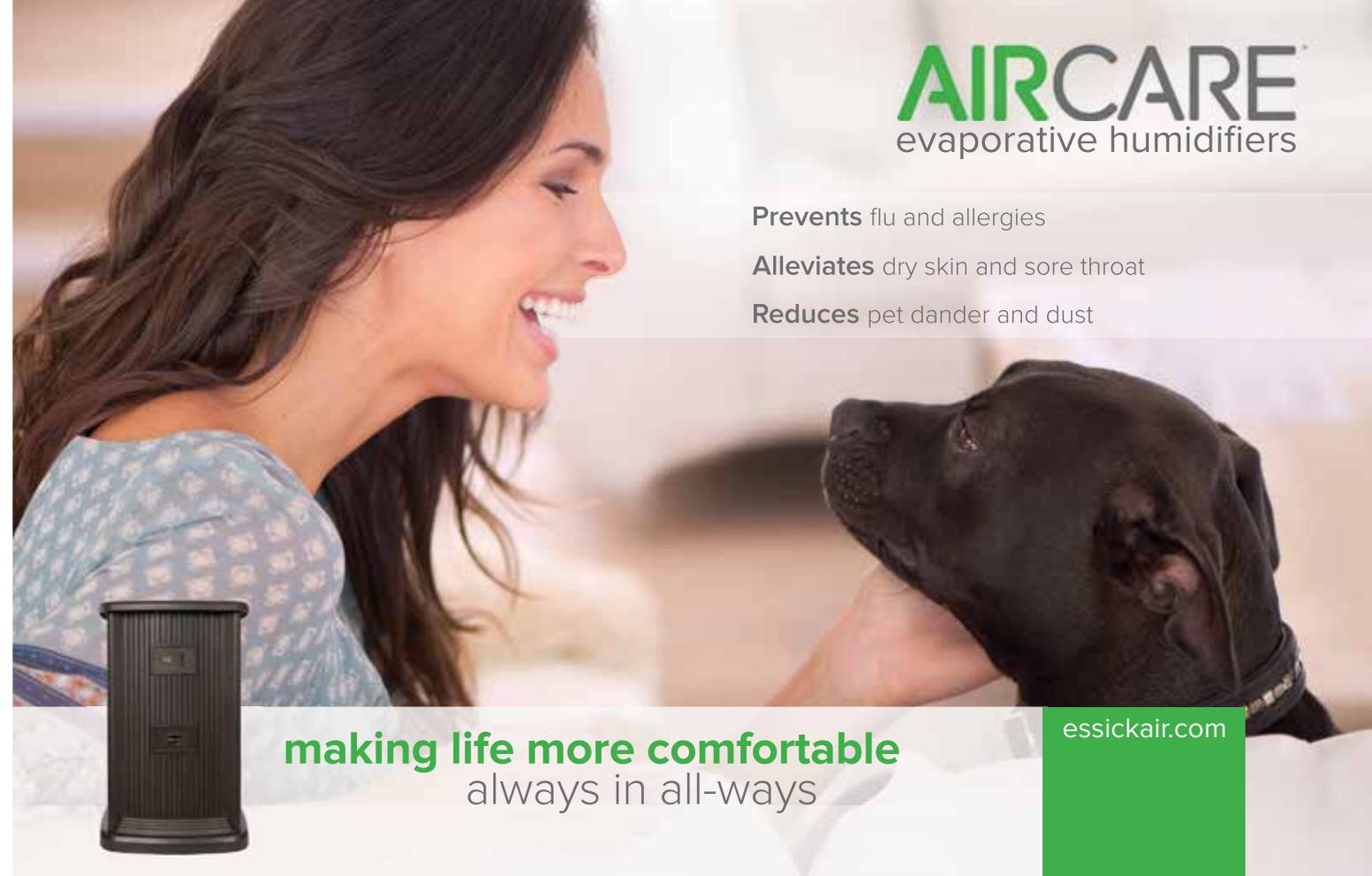
There are more than **90** known types of sleep disorders including the biggies — insomnia, sleep apnea, circadian rhythm disorders and restless leg syndrome.

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