

Health and Well-Being

July's topic is **Sleep**:

Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep and increasingly it has been found that pre-bedtime use of tablets and other screens appears to be an important factor contributing to our collective sleep debt. Late evening use of screens not only suppresses the normal rise in melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating sleep, but it revs it up just when we should be winding down. Whether you are watching T.V. or engaging in social media, the experience can be very psychologically stimulating, increasing alertness and making it harder to fall asleep.

Kids need even more sleep; 3-5 year olds need 11-13 hours and kids age 6-13 need 9-11 hours. Teaching school-aged children about healthy sleep habits is very important. Make your child's room conducive to sleep; dark, cool and quiet. Keep TV and computers out of the bedroom.

- **Avoid bright screens within 1-2 hours of your bedtime.** The blue light emitted by your phone, tablet, computer, or TV is especially disruptive. You can minimize the impact by using devices with smaller screens, turning the brightness down, or using light-altering software such as f.lux.
- **Say no to late-night television.** Not only does the light from a TV suppress melatonin, but many programs are stimulating rather than relaxing. Try listening to music or audio books instead.
- **Be smart about e-readers.** Devices that are backlit, such as the Kindle Fire or the iPad, are more disruptive than e-readers

that don't have their own light source—or good old-fashioned books.

- **When it's time to sleep, make sure the room is dark.** Use heavy curtains or shades to block light from windows, or try a sleep mask. Also consider covering up electronics that emit light.
- **Keep the lights down if you get up during the night.** If you need some light to move around safely, try installing a dim nightlight in the hall or bathroom or using a small flashlight. This will make it easier for you to fall back to sleep.

Your daytime eating habits play a role in how well you sleep, especially in the hours before bedtime.

- **Limit caffeine.** You might be surprised to know that caffeine can cause sleep problems up to ten to twelve hours after drinking it!
- **Avoid big meals at night.** Try to make dinnertime earlier in the evening, and avoid heavy, rich foods within two hours of bed. Spicy or acidic foods can cause stomach trouble and heartburn.
- **Avoid alcohol before bed.** While a nightcap may help you relax, it interferes with your sleep cycle once you're out.
- **Avoid drinking too many liquids in the evening.** Drinking lots of fluids may result in frequent bathroom trips throughout the night.

Sources:

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/how-to-sleep-better.htm>

<http://www.realsimple.com/health/preventative-health/sleep/sneaky-signs-sleep-deprived>

Blessings in good health,
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