



Are you getting enough rest?

Nodding off every night is more important than you might think.

Summer is here, and as the nights are lighter you might be finding it difficult to fall asleep at bedtime. However, while it's fun to stay up late, it's more important to get a good night's rest. A child aged between six and 13 needs on average around nine hours of sleep every night but just under half of 11 to 17 year olds say they are getting less than eight hours' sleep a night, according to the NHS. So, why do we need to sleep, and what happens if we don't?

Why do we sleep?

It seems strange that every night we drift off for hours on end, leaving ourselves unaware of what's happening around us. In fact, falling asleep meant that the earliest humans were at risk of being attacked by wild animals. So why do we do it?

Scientists don't know for sure why we sleep. What they do know is that it is as important as oxygen and water – we can't seem to live without it. Sleep keeps our brains and bodies healthy and helps us grow and develop. As you learn things throughout the day, your brain cells make connections with other brain cells and sleeping strengthens these links. During the day your brain produces a chemical toxic waste called amyloid beta. As you sleep, a special liquid called cerebral spinal fluid flushes out these toxins, a bit like a biological dishwasher. Plus, when you don't get enough sleep, your body releases a stress hormone called cortisol into the blood. This is why not getting enough sleep can make you feel stressed, forgetful and irritable.

ZZZZ....
On average we sleep for 229,961 hours during our lifetimes. If you live until you're 80, that's more than 25 years of sleeping.

SHORT SLEEPERS

Margaret Thatcher was Britain's first female Prime Minister. She famously said that she only needed four hours' sleep a night. Research suggests that around 1% of the population can survive on so little sleep.



Stage 2: Light sleep

This is the stage between being awake and being in a deep sleep. It is very easy to wake up at this point.

Stage 1: Dropping off

As you get ready for bed your body begins to prepare you for sleep. Your body starts producing a hormone called melatonin, a chemical substance that enters your bloodstream and makes you feel sleepy. Your core temperature drops so you're not too hot in the night.

Stage 3: Deep sleep

If you've ever been woken up at this stage you might feel very disorientated. During this time your brain and body are working very hard to repair and sort out things that you have learnt in the day.

Stage 4: Dreaming

Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is when you start to dream. It is called this because your eyes sometimes flicker even when they're closed. Your body relaxes and your breathing becomes rapid and shallow. People will reach REM four to six times in one night, and on average, it takes up around 25% of our time asleep.

The cycle of sleep

Stage 5: Waking

As you wake up, your melatonin levels start to drop and your core body temperature starts to rise. Brain activity increases as you get ready for the day.

WOW!
A whopping 41.5% of adults in the UK snore when they sleep – that's roughly 15 million snorers!

5 top tips for a good night's sleep

Keeping a healthy bedtime routine is important for your brain, so you feel fresh and able learn things at school. Here are some top tips for a restful night's sleep.



1. Get rid of gadgets
Smartphones and tablets give off a blue light that stops you from producing melatonin. This hormone is needed to help you drift off to sleep.

2. Keep your room at the right temperature

Making sure you're not too hot and not too cold is very important for getting a good sleep.



3. Avoid big meals
Big, heavy meals before bedtime can make you feel too full and stop you from falling asleep. If you're feeling peckish, have a glass of warm milk or some fruit.

4. Keep it dark

Keeping your room dark at night will trick your brain into thinking it is dark outside – even when it isn't. If it's too light, your body won't be in the mood for sleep.



5. Have a warm bath
Soaking in the bath before bed makes it easier for your muscles and mind to relax. It also helps your body get to the perfect temperature ready for sleep.

Animal sleeping habits

Different animals have different sleeping patterns.

Unlike animals that eat a lot of meat, giraffes graze on leaves, which gives them plenty of energy. They only need five to 30 minutes of deep sleep over 24 hours, whereas lions can sleep for up to 15 hours a day.

Fish don't actually sleep like land animals but they do have a rest; some just float but others wedge themselves into mud or coral to hide from

predators. Crocodiles sleep with one eye open and there are some birds, such as the Alpine swift, that can sleep while flying.



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