

Why sleep is important



Sleep is an essential part of our day. Experts say the optimal amount of sleep for adults is seven to eight hours per night. However, for various reasons, we may not always get the sleep we need.

Without enough sleep, we can become fatigued, moody, experience problems with our concentration and memory, and become affected by impaired judgement. Researchers from Harvard and Surrey universities have even linked sleep deprivation to cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, infections, and obesity.

Your body's clock is regulated by light. Ideally, when the sun goes down your body should slow down to get ready to sleep, according to Professor Charles Czeisler of Harvard University.

He says that the influence of technology on your body clock is significant because the light emitted by mobile devices and computers is precisely the light which disrupts this process.

"Light exposure," says Czeisler, "especially short wavelength blue-ish light in the evening, will reset our circadian rhythms to a later hour, postponing the release of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and making it more difficult for us to get up in the morning."

Dr Simon Archer of the University of Surrey has

been conducting genetic research into sleep and sleep deprivation and says that sleep deprivation has a significant impact on how the body runs.

Take sleep as seriously as you take eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly to reduce your risk for serious lifestyle diseases.

Try incorporate these tips into your evening routine:

- Reduce the light in your house and bedroom about two hours before you go to bed to help your body start to slow down.
- Switch off all electronic gadgets two hours before bed to avoid disrupting your brain's production of melatonin.
- Stop exercising two to four hours before going to bed.
- Make sure your room is cool and dark, and that your bed is comfortable.
- Avoid eating large meals shortly before bed but don't go to bed hungry either.
- Help your body establish a rhythm by waking up and going to bed at the same time every day, even on weekends.