

No Snooze? You Lose!

Here's why sleep is essential for health and how to grab more zzzzzz's. *By Ronni Rowland*

A glowing television, a dinging laptop computer, a smartphone blinking with messages and an e-reader half-tucked under a blanket. Not exactly a soothing backdrop for sleep!

But go into many kids' and adults' bedrooms today and the scene is an electric light show. According to a 2014 poll by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), 89 percent of adults and 75 percent of children have at least one electronic device in their bedrooms. Televisions are the most common and many are left on at night, one of many reasons for the prevalence of poor sleep.

Although experts generally recommend an average of 7-9 hours of sleep per night, depending on one's age, many of us don't get nearly enough shut-eye. The demands and distractions of modern life are cutting into vital sleep hours, and it's taking a toll on our wellbeing.

Sleepy time blues

When we sleep, it's a time for physical and mental repair. Sleep is essential for maintaining health, and it's easy to recognize the consequences of a bad night's sleep spent tossing and turning. You may wake up agitated, with low energy, and a lack of mental focus. For kids, a sleep deficit translates into crankiness, temper tantrums, an inability to concentrate, and when it comes to teenagers, it may even lead to falling asleep in class.

"Poor sleep can have significant effects on hormone and chemical balances in your system," explains Dr Ryan Pfeifer, spine and sports medicine physician at World-Path Clinic International. "Research has demonstrated that people with poor sleep are at risk for advanced skin aging, depression, chronic pain, decreased thinking ability, depressed sex drive, and increased appetite and weight gain. Sleep deprivation can even put you at risk for heart disease and stroke."

Serious consequences are also true for teens. "According to a recent study published in the *Journal of Sleep Research*, lack of sleep in adolescence has been linked to a greater susceptibility to colds and flu, high cholesterol, obesity and depression," adds Maja Kelly, upper school counselor at Shanghai Community International School, Pudong.

Sleep habits that are established at an early age set the stage for quality of life in the future.

Snooze rules

Do you keep a regular sleep schedule? The NSF poll found that parents who enforce bedtime rules have children who sleep an average of 1.1 hours longer than children without these rules.

Not surprisingly, parents relax their sleep-related rules as children get older. By the time kids reach 15-17 years old, only 35 percent of parents have rules for a strict bed-



time, television, phone and computer usage, caffeine, and video games.

“Most parents recognize the importance of a regular bedtime routine when their children are young,” notes Kelly. “However, parents sometimes assume teens can handle getting enough sleep on their own. This can be a mistake as teenagers often struggle to resist the distractions that are keeping them up late at night.”

School life in Shanghai is notoriously demanding. Hours spent on homework, tutoring and other extracurricular activities are taking away precious beauty sleep. Gentle reminders about time management and powering off gadgets can make the difference in your kids getting enough rest, essential for long-term success.

Goodnight noises everywhere

It's hard to believe, but you will spend approximately 25 years in bed over the course of your lifetime. With one out of three adults suffering from insomnia or other sleeping disorders, it's a good time to reflect on your own pre-bedtime routine and your bedroom's physical space.

“Good sleep is a sign of good health,” says Doris Rathgeber, founder and general manager of Body & Soul Medical Clinics.

Here are some recommendations from medical and TCM practitioners for getting a good night's sleep:

- Clear your bedroom of clutter, dim the lights, and unplug from electronics.
- Select a mattress that combines comfort and support. Use a pillow that supports the natural contour of your neck and keeps a level posture.
- Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, alcohol, and strenuous exercise before bed.
- Opt for quiet reading, meditation and mindful stretching.
- Put a few drops of lavender, chamomile or ylang-ylang essential oils on your pillow or in a warm bath to relax.
- Create a “sanctuary” conducive to peaceful sleep and model good habits for your kids.

A tried and true way for families to end the day is tucking in with a quiet storybook classic such as Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown.

“Goodnight stars. Goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere.” ☺

Recommended Daily Sleep

From the U.S. National Sleep Foundation

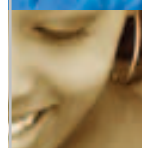
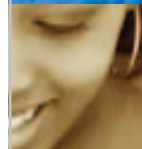
Infants/Babies*	0-2 months: 10.5-18.5 hours
	2-12 months: 14-15 hours
Toddlers/Children*	12-18 months: 13-15 hours
	18 months-3 years: 12-14 hours
	3-5 years: 11-13 hours
Adolescents	5-12 years: 9-11 hours
	8.5-9.5 hours
Adults/Older Adults	On average: 7-9 hours

*Total time includes naps.

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