

How much sleep do you really need?

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(HealthDay)—Health initiatives typically center on diet and fitness. But the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the Sleep Research Society state that getting enough sleep is just as important as eating right

and exercising.

Your health can truly suffer if you're constantly shortchanging yourself on sleep. Heart disease, diabetes and obesity as well as the risk of accidents like car crashes top the list. More than the embarrassment of falling asleep at an important meeting, [sleep deprivation](#) can result in cognitive impairment—your judgment just isn't as sharp as it should be.

Missing out on needed sleep leads to higher levels of stress hormones and the hormones that regulate hunger. That can lead to the possibility of overeating and gaining weight. Poor sleep also been associated with increases in the inflammatory markers often seen with autoimmune diseases.

Over a third of American adults say they sleep less than 7 hours a night—the trigger point at which health problems can start. Worse still, the number of people getting less than 6 hours is on the rise. Many think that as long as they can still function, they must be getting enough sleep.

So what's the right amount of nightly sleep?

Everyone has his or her unique needs, but on average 7 to 8 hours is associated with the lowest risk of [heart disease](#). Some people may need 9 hours. But like Goldilocks, you want to get just the right amount—not too little or too much. Some studies have found an association between more than 8 hours of [sleep](#) and obesity.

More information: Learn more about the [importance of sleep](#) from the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

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