



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



Sleep: Enough of It Is An Essential Ingredient For Better Health

If you have ever felt yourself dozing off during the day, you are not alone. Millions of Americans suffer from lack of sleep that affects their daily functioning. Most underestimate sleep's importance, viewing it as a necessary, but non-productive, activity; others see it as a luxury. Increasingly however, sleep is being recognized as the foundation of both good mental and physical health.

Sleep insufficiency is not only a personal health issue. It is a public health concern—linked not only to motor vehicle crashes, industrial disasters, and medical and other occupational errors, but also chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and depression. Crucial brain functions occur during sleep that cannot be reproduced while awake and lack of sleep increases stress hormones, pushing up blood pressure. If that's not enough, research has also shown this hormone disruption can stimulate appetite and increase cravings for high-carbohydrate, high-fat foods, contributing to our obesity crisis! Sleep deprivation may also be to blame for symptoms in children often labeled as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

With today's hectic and stressful lifestyles, it is not surprising that poor sleep, also known as insomnia, is common and on the rise. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that since the 1980s, the percentage of adults who report fewer than seven hours of sleep on average has risen to approximately one third of all Americans. In New York State, it is even higher, with 40 percent reporting fewer than seven hours on average. Chronic insomnia, described as lasting longer than three or four weeks, affects nearly 10 percent of the population. That means every night in Putnam County approximately 10,000 residents struggle with persistent sleeplessness, while thousands more experience sporadic lapses that jeopardize their health, and that of others.

How much sleep we need is a tricky question. It varies by age and there are individual differences. Still most people think they need less than they really do. The National Sleep Foundation recommends 10 to 11 hours nightly for young school-aged children (5 to 10 years old); 8.5 to 9.5 hours for older children (10 to 17 years of age); and 7 to 9 hours for adults.

Getting the right amount of sleep in an overscheduled world isn't easy. It takes effort and planning, but the health benefits are real. Adequate sleep starts with an evening routine and a consistent bedtime. For two to three hours before bedtime avoid eating, especially large meals, and eliminate caffeine and alcohol. Smoking also interferes with sleep. On the other hand, regular exercise enhances it. More details about improving your sleep are available online at www.sleepfoundation.org and www.cdc.gov/sleep. Make an effort to get adequate sleep—your health depends on it.

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