



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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How is Your Sleep Health Linked to Your Mental Health?

Adapted from the National Sleep Foundation

Hint: There's a BIG connection between sleep and emotional well-being. Sleep is a critical part of your overall health. And the quality and quantity of your sleep are deeply connected to your mental and emotional well-being. During sleep, the body and mind go through various restorative processes, including repairing and rejuvenating cells, consolidating memories, processing emotions, and cleansing toxins from the brain. Good sleep can help you regulate your emotions better as well as improve cognitive skills like learning and attention.

Our Sleep and Our Minds are Interlinked

When we don't get enough of the quality sleep we need for our bodies to function at their best, it can affect our mental health, too. Poor sleep can make it harder to cope with daily stress. We may be more impacted by minor negative things and less likely to notice the positive parts of our day.

Think about the last time you didn't sleep your best. Did you feel irritable or short-tempered? It's likely that you had trouble dealing with emotions that arose from minor challenges. Maybe you noticed that it was easier to slip into feelings of stress, worry or anxiety. And, getting too little or poor-quality sleep, for even a few nights a week, is associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel: when we

sleep well, we are recharged and ready to face the day. Following good sleep, we tend to cope better, process information in a more balanced fashion, and have a brighter outlook on life.

2023 Sleep in America® Poll Findings

For the 2023 Sleep in America® Poll, the results made it clear that American adults with healthier sleep habits are less likely to experience significant depressive symptoms.

- Over 90% of American adults with very good overall sleep health say they have no significant depressive symptoms.
- Almost 7 in 10 Americans (65%) who are dissatisfied with their sleep also experience mild or greater levels of depressive symptoms.
- People with difficulties falling or staying asleep just 2 nights a week have higher levels of depressive symptoms than those without sleep difficulties.
- In adults who get less than the NSF's recommended 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night, over half experience mild or greater levels of depressive symptoms.

Mental Health Can Affect Your Sleep Health

Just as sleep can affect our mental well-being, those dealing with mental health issues often experience problems with their sleep. In fact, the two often go hand in hand; depression can lead to sleep problems, and sleep problems can worsen depressive symptoms.

Experiencing depression can result in us sleeping poorly, spending more time lying awake in bed for longer hours, being less physically active and getting less exposure to bright daylight—all of which can result in disrupted sleep. If you have specific symptoms or continue to be concerned about not getting the sleep

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you need after taking some basic steps, it's a good idea to seek professional help from a clinician. For anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts, contact the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988.

By understanding the connection between sleep and mental health, you can start taking steps to improve your sleep health and your emotional well-being.

A Healthy Night's Sleep Starts the Moment You Wake Up

Taking small steps in your day goes a long way in helping you improve your sleep at night. Did you know that a good night's sleep starts with what you do during the day? In fact, from the moment you wake up, you're affecting your sleep that night. Making changes to your daytime habits not only sets the stage for better sleep but also leads to lower stress levels and better overall health.

Get Some Sun

The right light exposure plays a big part in helping manage your circadian rhythms, the natural process behind staying awake and falling asleep. It's also a super-influential factor for your overall sleep health. So, it makes sense that bright, natural light during the day, especially in the morning, helps you feel awake and energized, while dim light in the evening, especially before bed, helps you wind down and fall asleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation survey, people who spent a moderate amount of time outdoors (3-5 hours per day) reported the highest sleep health. However, nearly half of Americans say they're not exposed to bright light indoors in the morning and afternoon.

If you're not getting much exposure to natural light, step outside for at least an hour each morning or afternoon and see the positive difference a little sunlight can make in your sleep health. Get some bonus sunshine by having your morning coffee outside, or taking your dog for an extra walk (they need vitamin D, too!).

Get Up and Get Moving

Making regular exercise part of your daily routine keeps you feeling energized during the day and can reduce daytime sleepiness. While daily physical activity has widespread health benefits and promotes deeper sleep

at night, not everyone is getting their sweat on long enough to feel the positive effects.

Many Americans are sedentary for much of the day—with more than a third falling short of CDC recommendations for 2.5 hours of moderate or vigorous activity each week, like brisk walking, jogging, or running. If you're parked behind a desk most of the day, even some light physical activity can go a long way in improving your sleep health. Ride your bike to work if you can, or use your work breaks to take brisk walks outside. Skip the elevator and walk up and down your building's stairs. Consider getting up a little earlier and make a 30-minute workout part of your pre-work routine. Regular exercise, even a little here and there, can help you fall asleep faster. This can result in a deeper, more satisfying night of sleep.

Mealtime Consistency is Key

Eating your meals at a consistent time each day creates another important element of your daily routine that positively affects your sleep cycle. While routinely eating meals on a regular schedule contributes to better quality sleep, 4 in 10 Americans polled say that their meals aren't part of a regular, daily routine. Irregular meal times or skipped meals can negatively affect your ability to maintain sleep and wake schedules, especially if meals are eaten too close to bedtime.

Plan on eating meals at the same time every day and be sure to have your last meal at least 2-3 hours before bedtime to allow your food to fully digest before you turn in for the night. We've all experienced that haunting restlessness that can come from hitting the pillow soon after a meal.

Cut Back on Caffeine - Or Skip it Altogether

The less caffeinated you are during the day, the more likely you'll sleep well at night. Grabbing a cup of coffee might seem like an easy fix after a night of tossing and turning, but the caffeine you're drinking to perk up may be winding down your sleep time.

Healthy Sleep Also Starts Before You Hit the Sheets

Improve how you sleep with small changes to your evening routine too.

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Follow a Sleep Schedule

Going to bed or waking up at the same time every day of the week helps your ability to fall asleep when you want to. Also, a regular schedule helps to sync your circadian rhythm, which dictates when you feel sleepy or awake. Most adults should aim to get seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Keep your sleep schedule consistent by going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time every morning, even on weekends.

Turn Out the Lights

As you continue to wind down in the evening, dim the lights. Dim light at night helps regulate the circadian rhythm. Blackout curtains and blinds are even better because they eliminate light pollution and remove outside light, creating a dark environment that's primed for sleep.

Stop Looking At Screens

There's a good reason why your brain still feels wide awake when you're scrolling at 2 AM. Electronic devices emit blue light and prevent the natural production of melatonin—the chemical that tells your brain that it's time to sleep. However, over half of Americans polled say that they look at screens within an hour before bedtime or in bed before going to sleep.

Ideally, your bedroom should be free from televisions, tablets, phones, and laptops. If it's not possible to remove blue-light-emitting electronics from the bedroom completely, simply turn them off and stop using them for at least an hour before you go to bed. If you like to read before bed, try switching out your tablet or phone for a real book. It's a simple tweak, and you'll notice how much faster you will drift off to sleep.

Create a Comfy Environment for Sleep

A dark, cool bedroom that is free of distractions is the ideal place to get a good night of sleep. Add items to your bedroom that enhance sleep comfort. Invest in cozy bedding. Find a comfortable pillow that will help support your neck and back throughout the night. And look for mattresses and pillows that support your spine.

If you're a hot- or cold sleeper, find bedding that's designed to help maintain your ideal temperature. Keep the room temperature cool, between 60 to 67 degrees. You may need to change your sheets or blankets to fit the weather and sleep comfortably. And subdue nearby

sources of noise with a sound conditioner or a small fan. This helps keep you fast asleep by masking unexpected sounds.

Having a solid night of sleep starts with a bedroom and bedtime routine designed for optimal sleep—all so you can wake up feeling well-rested and ready to take on the day.

References:

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