

SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH

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With Daylight Saving Time being this Sunday, March 8, 2009, many of us will struggle to adjust to the time change and have some sleep loss. Many people think that the body “shuts down” while we sleep, but in fact many important functions occur. Sleep helps us to think clearly, react quickly and create memories. It appears to be essential for learning challenging tasks and to solve problems creatively.

Sleep also affects mood. Children and teens that do not get enough sleep are more likely to exhibit poor behavior and anyone without enough sleep will be more irritable and may become depressed. High blood pressure, heart disease and other medical conditions have all been linked to lack of sleep. We also know growth hormone in children and hormones that affect immunity, cell repair and muscle development are affected by quality sleep. Sleep may also affect the hormones that control how the body uses energy. Lack of sleep has been associated with obesity, diabetes and the preference for high calorie, high carbohydrate food.

Newborns usually sleep 16-18 hours a day while pre-school children need 10-12 hours. Both school-age children and teens need at least 9 hours a night. Most adults function best with at least 7 hours of sleep a night. As we get older, we seem to spend less time in deep sleep and wake up more easily. Fortunately nature seems to make us drowsy between midnight and 7 am, but we also tend to get sleepy from 1 pm to 4 pm when most of us need to be functioning efficiently at work or school.

Shift workers do have more problems sleeping during the day and staying awake at work. They suffer more heart disease, digestive disorders, infertility and emotional problems than those with day jobs. This may be related to chronic lack of sleep.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends 13 tips for improving the quality of your sleep: 1) Stick to a sleep schedule. Even on weekends try to go to bed and get up at the same time. 2) Exercise regularly, but do it 5-6 hours before bedtime. Getting enough daily exercise helps sleep quality, but hormones released during exercise can keep you awake. 3) No caffeine or nicotine. Caffeine in coffee, tea, chocolate and some soft drinks like colas can last up to 8 hours. Nicotine is also a stimulant. 4) No alcohol before bed. Your sleep will not be as deep or last as long after a nightcap. 5) Avoid large meals and beverages late at night. Both can cause indigestion and too much fluid can wake you up to go to the bathroom during the night. 6) Try not to take medicines that disrupt or delay sleep. Some prescriptions for the heart, blood pressure and asthma and over-the-counter drugs for cold, cough or allergy can disrupt sleep. See whether you can take them earlier in the day or can switch to other drugs. 7) Don't nap after 3 pm. Also keep naps to under an hour. 8) Relax before bed. Establish a bedtime ritual like reading or listening to music that helps you to prepare to sleep. 9) Take a hot bath before bed. The drop in body temperature afterward may make you sleepy. Your muscles will relax and have less pain. 10) Create a good sleeping environment. Keep the room temperature cool. Remove distractions like the TV, noise, a computer or a bed that is uncomfortable. 11) Get out in the sun. Thirty minutes outside in the daylight may help regulate your sleep patterns. 12) Don't lie in bed if

you cannot sleep. If after 20 minutes you cannot sleep, get up and do something relaxing. 13) See a doctor if you continue to have problems sleeping. You may have a sleeping disorder like sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome or insomnia that can be treated.

I hope this helps you get a better night's sleep. If you need any further information, please feel free to contact the UGA Cooperative Extension office at (912)-287-2456.