Sleep
Productivity and You

Sleepless in America

Tired? Welcome to the club. A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that almost one-third of American adults get less than seven hours of sleep per night.

Despite all the talk of "work-life balance," for many of us the easiest thing to ditch when our schedules start bursting at the seams with family and work-related responsibilities is sleep.

Burning the Midnight Oil

Because our culture encourages a fast-paced lifestyle, it seems natural that getting more done sometimes requires giving up some time in the sack. And if the trade-off is a bit of bleary-eyed morning grumpiness, then we'll happily take it.

Here's why that attitude is counterproductive—multiple studies show that you're actually less productive when you aren't getting enough sleep. In fact, sleeping more may actually help you get more done during the day.

Your Productivity Wake-up Call

According to experts, adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep per night. Skipping even an hour of needed rest can carry significant costs, including:

- Poor judgment
- Difficulty learning and retaining information
- Difficulty processing complex information
- Delayed reaction time
- Irritability
- Impatience
- Negativity
- Fatigue
- Decreased concentration
- Diminished self-control
- Poor reflexes

When you take these factors into consideration, it's easy to see how skimping on your shut-eye is the last thing you want to do. Your best, most productive work almost always comes when you're well rested.

Keys to a Good Night's Rest

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule. Instead of sleeping in on weekends to compensate for lost sleep, try going to bed an hour or two earlier at night and keeping this schedule all week long.
- Use your bed only for sleeping. This will help train your body to fall asleep quickly when you tuck in for the night.
- Keep your room dark.
- Don't exercise too close to bedtime. The resulting endorphin release will energize you and keep you awake.
- Use "white noise" such as a fan to dampen outside noise.
- Lower the thermostat. Studies show that a cooler temperature helps create more restful sleep. Go as low as you can while still remaining comfortable.
- Avoid caffeine in the evening. Half the caffeine you consume will still be in your body six hours later.
- Don't use alcohol to excess. Having a few drinks may help you go to sleep, but it will also disrupt your sleep cycle, leaving you tired in the morning.
- Invest in a good mattress. Mattresses stop offering the right amount of support after about ten years.
- Shut out negativity. If television news causes you stress and worry, then skip that late newscast and do something that relaxes you instead.

The Power of Napping

When all else fails, grab a pillow and snooze a bit during the day. Recent studies suggest that a nap as short as just ten minutes can boost mental alertness and productivity for hours.

Don't buy into the idea that napping is lazy. Cultures all over the world build nap time right into their workdays. Famous nap takers include Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, and Johannes Brahms.

Beating the Busy Bug

The most common excuse people give for not getting enough sleep is that they're simply too busy. Here's the bottom line: You simply can't live a rich, happy, and productive life when you're stumbling around like a zombie due to lack of sleep.

If the daily grind is overwhelming your schedule, it's time to start eliminating all but your highest priorities and obligations and carving out some extra time for a good night's rest. Start small and try going to bed ten minutes earlier each night until you're getting a full eight hours of sleep.

Once you get there, maintain this schedule for a week and take note of the difference in your mood, energy level, and productivity. Chances are, you'll feel like a new person.