

## Sleep Better for More Energy

By: Jim Gorman

What a night. The woman of your dreams appeared.

Your pulse raced. Heavy breathing ensued. You popped five long-lasting erections.

You do remember it, right?

Oh, wait, you were asleep. And that's not all you missed. Under cover of night, sleep floods your veins with age-defying human growth hormone. Sleep raises an army of T cells and sends them into battle against colds and infection. Sleep resets the appetite controls that tell you to not hit the turn signal when you pass a McDonald's.

And, of course, sleep helps you above the neck as well as below the belt. "It stabilizes your waking brain, makes you more alert, and allows you to process information faster," says David Dinges, Ph. D., who studies shut-eye at the University of Pennsylvania. "It helps you remember things and consolidate those memories." You won't get that from a Red Bull.

So then why are we engaged in a society-wide experiment in sleep deprivation? Average nightly sleep time during the workweek in the United States is down nearly 20 minutes in the last decade, to 6 hours and 40 minutes. And men ages 30 to 44 are the worst offenders: Thirty percent of them say they log less than 6 hours of sleep at night, according to a survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The price you pay for this sleep deficit is more than just lost productivity—your health can suffer too. So wake up! It's time to shed some light on this dark territory.

### Log More Hours

**Successful, driven guys should be good to go on 5 hours a night**

#### **MYTH**

True, Napoleon slept 4 to 5 hours a night, and Thomas Edison got by on 4. But world domination and the lightbulb might have been mere warmups had these guys slept more. Sleep scientists estimate that only 10 percent of adults are hardwired to need appreciably less (or more) sleep than the recommended 7 to 8 hours. And by cheating on sleep, you're limping through life with the cranial equivalent of a torn calf muscle.

Scariest still, people who are sleep deprived often don't even know they've turned into zombies. After dividing 48 volunteers into four sleep regimens—8, 6, 4, and zero hours a night (a. k. a. torture)—University of Pennsylvania researchers found that the 6-hours-a-night group fared as poorly on measures of alertness and memory after 2 weeks as the no-sleep crew did after 24 hours. But participants in the 6-hour group didn't feel very sleepy even when they were performing at their worst.

Accumulating a sleep deficit also leads to "microsleeps" while you're awake. "Your brain becomes unstable and will go 'off-line' for half a second," Dinges says. The more sleep-deprived you are, the more frequent and longer the lapses.

**Snooze strategy:** If you didn't sleep 7 or 8 hours every night this past week, go to bed this weekend at your regular weekday time, but don't set your alarm clock. Did you rise on Saturday and Sunday at the same time you would have on, say, a Tuesday? Then you may be one of those few people who can sleep less yet remain healthy.

The rest of us mere mortals can begin to repay our sleep debt by dozing 10 hours a night on weekends and then sticking to 7 to 8 hours during the week. Your brain will use this strategy whenever you accumulate a sleep debt, says Ruth Benca, M. D., Ph. D., medical director of the Wisconsin Sleep Center. Otherwise, you want to stay consistent with your sleeping.

## What Sleep Says About Your Health

### Frequently needing to pee in the middle of the night might indicate a health problem

#### TRUTH

That first stumble to the bathroom in the dark can be chalked up to the beer you drank watching the Knicks game. The second one can spell trouble. "If you habitually take two or more bathroom trips a night, you probably have obstructive sleep apnea," says Alex Chediak, M. D., medical director of the Miami Sleep Disorders Center.

With sleep apnea, the soft tissue at the back of your throat blocks your upper airway during sleep, stopping your breathing for anywhere from 10 seconds to a minute or even longer. This can occur hundreds of times in a night, depriving you of restorative deep sleep and starving your vital organs of oxygen. No wonder sleep apnea has been linked to heart disease, hypertension, and mood disorders.

But why does it wake you up to pee? Because those mini-suffocations result in lower circulating oxygen levels, your heart pumps harder, raising your blood pressure. As excess fluid builds up in your veins, a feedback loop triggers the release of a pressure-relieving diuretic, making you pee.

An enlarged prostate and high blood sugar can also prompt middle-of-the-night bowl breaks. But with those conditions, says Dr. Chediak, you'll pee a lot day and night.

**Snooze strategy:** Raising the pillow end of your bed by a few inches can help prevent that tissue from blocking your throat. Snoring could also be waking you in the middle of the night, and one major cause is nasal obstruction. Wash out mucus and irritants by mixing 1/4 teaspoon of table salt in 2 cups of warm water and flushing your nose twice a day using a medical or bulb syringe. Japanese researchers found that people with nasal obstruction were twice as likely to experience daytime fatigue as people with clear passageways. For video instruction on the technique, visit [mayoclinic.com](http://mayoclinic.com) and search "nasal irrigation."

If the peeing persists around the clock, schedule a prostate exam and have your blood-sugar level checked by your doctor after an overnight fast.

## Beat the Postlunch Bonk

**The postlunch bonk can't be avoided**

**MYTH**

Many Europeans scarf down a carb-loaded lunch and then shut down from 1 to 4 in the afternoon. But with unemployment soaring, let's assume a 3-hour nap won't play well at the office. If you find yourself entering what amounts to a food coma after lunch, you're probably eating too many carbohydrates in the morning.

And what you're *not* getting enough of is making it worse. "A postlunch crash is a telltale sign of poor nighttime sleep, as is dozing in meetings, theater performances, or similar environments," says Dr. Benca.

Not sure if you're experiencing a modest dip or a true crash? Take a minute or two to fill out the Epworth Sleepiness Scale ([sleepeducation.com/sleepscale.aspx](http://sleepeducation.com/sleepscale.aspx)). This online questionnaire is the same one sleep docs use on their new patients.

**Snooze strategy:** Along with improving your nightly sleep pattern, eat three small meals spaced 2 hours apart in the morning. Try a protein shake at 7 a. m., two eggs and a small cup of oatmeal at 9, and an apple and a handful of almonds at 11. You'll consume fewer carbohydrates, and you won't be as likely to overeat at lunchtime.

**In fact, a salad with grilled chicken and avocado on top should be enough to keep your mind focused and your head off the desk all afternoon, says Keith Berkowitz, M. D., medical director of the Center for Balanced Health in New York City.**

## Early Riser or Insomnia?

**Waking up at 4 a. m. every day just means I'm an early riser**

**MYTH**

More likely, you—along with 60 million other Americans—have insomnia, an inability to fall or stay asleep. "Insomniacs wake at the slightest disturbance and feel unrefreshed in the

morning," says Dr. Benca. Insufficient sleep exposes the sufferer to a litany of performance and health problems. In a study published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, researchers found insomniacs were more than twice as likely as normal sleepers to call in sick for long periods.

**Snooze strategy:** Let's assume that you've already cut back on caffeine. What you want to do is make your sleep more efficient, says W. Christopher Winter, M. D., medical director of the sleep medicine center at Martha Jefferson Hospital in Charlottesville, Virginia. Dr. Winter likens poor sleep to a bookcase missing a few volumes, representing gaps in your sleep. By going to bed an hour or so later, those gaps won't be as long as or frequent. Soon enough, you should be waking up after the roosters, not before them.

## Work Out to Sleep More Soundly

**A tiring workout before bed will help me sleep more soundly**

### MYTH

Regular exercise is one of the best sleep-promoting remedies, but working out late at night risks leaving you wide-eyed in bed. "It's easiest to fall asleep when your core body temperature goes relatively quickly from very warm to very cold," says Dr. Chediak. "After exercise, that cooling process takes 4 to 6 hours."

It's better to take a hot bath or sauna session close to bedtime. "Anything that raises core body temperature will help get you started on sleep," says Dr. Chediak. He says the cooldown period into the sleep zone following a bath takes just 2 hours—half that of an exercise session.

**Snooze strategy:** Work out—but do it first thing in the morning for all-day energy and a quick drift into deep, restful sleep. Studies show that exercise improves sleep as effectively as a class of sleeping pills that includes Restoril and Halcion.

## Drink Yourself to Sleep

**Alcohol can help me sleep at night**

### MYTH

Only if you equate a good night's sleep with passing out drunk on your girlfriend's sofa. Alcohol messes with the normal sleep cycle, especially the back end of the cycle. "Four hours into sleep, alcohol wears off and leaves you in an excitable state," says Dr. Chediak. You'll sleep lighter, wake more easily, and be hung over when you do wake. After three nights of intoxicated slumber, even the initial knockout punch begins to wane.

Dr. Chediak warns of another drawback to using a six-pack as a sleep aid. "Being a muscle relaxant as well as sedative, alcohol can even create sleep apnea symptoms in snorers who don't otherwise have the condition," he says. Unfortunately, liquor is a go-to therapy for many

sheep counters, used as often as over-the-counter sleeping pills and more often than prescription sleep meds.

**Snooze strategy:** Be consistent with your overall schedule and you won't need booze. "Your internal clock is a structure in your brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus," says Dr. Winter. "To set this clock, eat your breakfast, lunch, and dinner at exactly the same time every day for a week."