



SLEEP: Frequently Asked Questions

How much sleep is enough?

A reasonable average is eight hours a night, but anything between six and ten is normal. Ten might be a little on the long side, only because it cuts rather a lot into the day. Some healthy people can get by on as little as five and, at a stretch, four hours sleep, but these are exceptions. Perhaps the only measure of the amount of sleep we need is that which allows us to feel well. Too much or too little can make a person irritable and tired.

Why do we sleep less as we get older?

As we get older, we tend to do fewer and fewer new things and the sleep process of filing and reorganizing becomes less and less significant. Therefore, fewer and fewer hours are set-aside for this purpose and our sleep requirements diminish.

Is it possible to do without any sleep?

The answer is definitely no! Many people claim not to sleep at all but when investigated by scientists it has been found that they do fall asleep, although they are not aware of it. For psychological reasons, some people may go through periods of having immense difficulty sleeping and, after a period of intense shock (such as the death of a close relative or friend) may be unable to sleep for two or three nights in a row. Sooner or later, however, the sleep drive overtakes them and their cycle gradually returns to normal.

Is it possible to have too much sleep?

For the normal, healthy person, the answer is no. One will sleep as much as one's brain requires. Very heavy and excessive sleep (over ten hours at a stretch), if it occurs frequently, is often a sign of depression and, in some cases, may denote a physical illness of some kind. There are some illnesses of a tropical origin in which people sleep more or less perpetually.

Can you pay off a sleep debt with an extra long night's sleep?

It depends on how great the sleep debt is, but if talking about missing one or possibly two night's sleep, then one single good night's rest will usually get rid of the backlog. People who have been under immense strain (such as the survivors of a major accident or disaster) may sleep for 24 or 36 hours at a stretch.

Can you learn while you are asleep?

Research has shown that the brain is highly active during sleep and performs all kinds of operations vital to its survival. For this reason, even if you could feed in information during sleep, the results might be more harmful than beneficial. In any case, no conclusive evidence of sleep-learning has been found.

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