How Does Sleep Affect Your Overall Health?

Are you getting enough sleep at night? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one third of adults aren't getting the sleep they need, and you could be one of them. The National Sleep Foundation suggests that adults ages 18 to 64 get between seven and nine hours of sleep every night.

Getting enough sleep isn't just about how you feel the next day. Over time, it can have a profound effect on your health. Here are just five ways sleep affects your health.

Sleep Affects Your Cardiovascular Health

When you sleep, your body is working to repair itself. This is especially true when it comes to your heart and blood vessels. Getting too little sleep is said to increase your risk of heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, stroke, and high blood pressure.

Researchers suggest two ways in which this link occurs. The first is through direct physical changes and the other is through behavioral factors that impact both your sleep patterns and your heart. According to the National Sleep Foundation, individuals who sleep fewer than six hours per night are twice as likely to experience a heart attack or stroke compared to those who sleep six to eight hours, and that's when accounting for weight, age, and smoking and exercise habits.

Sleep Deprivation Increases Obesity Risk

Another physical impact of sleep is on obesity, where too little sleep increases your chances of gaining weight. Obesity puts a strain on your bones, muscles, blood vessels, and other organs to negatively impact your overall health. This can increase your risk of:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- High blood pressure
- Osteoarthritis
- Infertility

The Harvard School of Public Health suggests several reasons behind the sleep-obesity relationship. Among them, it's believed that sleep-deprived individuals may exercise less because they don't have the energy. Not getting enough sleep can also increase your daily caloric intake. This is because lack of sleep impacts hormone balances, particularly those that control appetite. Not only that, but people who sleep less have more opportunities to eat throughout the day, so they're bringing in more calories overall while burning fewer calories.

Sleep is Associated with Immune Function

Research suggests that individuals who don't get enough sleep have a harder time fighting off common infections than those who get enough shut-eye at night. Your body uses proteins called cytokines to promote sleep, and when you're sick or stressed, these cytokines need to increase to help combat symptoms. However, getting too little sleep decreases production of cytokines as well as antibodies, making it harder for your body to fight infection.

Sleep Impacts Mood and Decision-Making Skills

While you're sleeping, your body isn't just recharging on the physical level. It's also working to refresh your mental capacities. You're probably familiar with how a sleepless night leaves you irritable in the morning, but long-term sleep deprivation can severely impact your mental health. [According to researchers](#), there's a strong link between sleep and emotional regulation. Sleep plays a large role in memory, mood, decision-making and problem-solving skills, and creativity. Therefore, the amount of sleep—and quality of sleep—you get can greatly affect your performance in school and work.

Sleep Deprivation is Linked to Depression

When it comes to sleep and mental health, the link goes far beyond irritability and creativity. Approximately 90 percent of patients with major depression experience sleep abnormalities. Normalizing sleep patterns can reduce the risk of depression relapse while continued abnormalities have been shown to increase risk of relapse. A similar link has been seen in patients with PTSD. It's believed that this relationship between sleep and depression is bi-directional, meaning sleep deprivation can lead to depression and vice versa.

With these points in mind, it may be time to reevaluate your sleep schedule to ensure you're getting enough shut-eye at night. Your health depends on it.