

Need more sleep? You must be dreaming

The Health Column

1398
2014

5 March 2014

It seems we are never satisfied with the amount of sleep we get. We either don't get enough and wake up tired, or we get too much and wake up feeling sluggish.

Just how much sleep we need is subject to debate but the National Sleep Foundation has explored how many hours of sleep your body needs at different ages.

Interestingly, sleep needs vary across ages and are especially affected by your lifestyle and your general health. This means there is no easy answer to how much sleep you may need and to determine the right amount it's important to assess not only where you fall on the "sleep needs spectrum," but also to examine what lifestyle factors are affecting the quality and quantity of your sleep such as work schedules and stress. To get the sleep you need, you must look at the big picture.

Research has found that in general, newborns need 12-18 hours of sleep a day, infants 14-15 hours, toddlers 12-14 hours, preschoolers 11-13 hours, school-age children 10-11 hours, teens 8.5-9.25 hours, and adults 7-9 hours.

Though research cannot pinpoint an amount of sleep needed by people at different ages, the above figures are the "rule-of-thumb" amounts most experts have agreed upon.

The National Sleep Foundation website (www.sleepfoundation.org) points out it's important to pay attention to your own individual needs by assessing how you feel on different amounts of sleep.



Photo by Carla Peroni | sxc.hu

The research also pinpoints that not only do different age groups need different amounts of sleep, but sleep needs are also individual. Just like any other characteristics you are born with, the amount of sleep you need to function best may be different for you than for someone who is of the same age and gender.

Therefore while you may be at your absolute best sleeping seven hours a night, someone else may clearly need nine hours to have a happy, productive life.

A study some years ago confirmed the fact that sleep needs vary across populations, and the study called for further research to identify traits within genes that may provide a "map" to explain how sleep needs differ among individuals.

Another reason there is "no magic number" for your sleep results from two different factors that researchers are learning about: a person's basal sleep need – the amount of sleep our bodies

need on a regular basis for optimal performance – and sleep debt, the accumulated sleep that is lost to poor sleep habits, sickness, awakenings due to environmental factors or other causes.

Healthy adults have a basal sleep need of seven to eight hours every night, but where things get complicated is the interaction between the basal need and sleep debt. For instance, you might meet your basal sleep need on any single night or a few nights in a row, but still have an unresolved sleep debt that may make you feel more sleepy and less alert at times, particularly in conjunction with circadian dips, those times in the 24-hour cycle when we are biologically programmed to be more sleepy and less alert, such as overnight hours and mid-afternoon. You may feel overwhelmingly sleepy quite suddenly at these times, shortly before bedtime or feel sleepy upon awakening. The good news is that some research suggests that the accumulated sleep debt can be worked down or "paid off".

However, if you feel you have a sleep disorder you should seek professional help, and your local pharmacy is your health destination where your community pharmacist can help.

Your Self Care pharmacy has a Sleeping Problems fact card available to provide information and for the nearest location of your Self Care pharmacy to pick up your *Sleeping problems* or *Relaxation techniques* Fact Card, phone the Pharmaceutical Society on 1300 369 772 or visit the website: www.psa.org.au and first click on "Self Care" then "Use the Self Care Pharmacy Finder".