



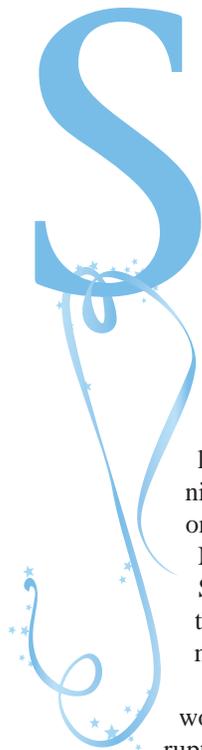
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PHOTO BY JEFF SILKER

Why Women Need Their Beauty Sleep

*The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads.
And mama in her 'kerchief and I in my cap
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap.....*

Those familiar words from the classic tale *The Night Before Christmas* by Clement Clark Moore bring fond memories of climbing into bed on a frosty winter night under a heavy quilt blanket to enjoy a wonderful night of sleep. For many women, all they want for Christmas is a good night's sleep. Women seem to understand that a good night's rest is central to their overall health and well-being.



urveys by the Better Sleep Council show that women are failing to get the sleep they need. Research shows that women are more sleep deprived than men, have greater difficulty falling to sleep and staying asleep, and experience more daytime sleepiness. In fact, 68 percent of American women admit to sleeping less than the recommended average of eight hours of sleep per night.

Before Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb, people slept an average of ten hours a night. Today Americans average 6.9 hours of sleep on weeknights and 7.5 hours on weekends. The National Sleep Foundation's (NSF) Women and Sleep Poll found the average woman between age thirty and sixty sleeps only six hours and forty-one minutes during the workweek.

Why don't women sleep well? One in four women report that pain or physical discomfort interrupted their sleep three nights a week or more. Pain conditions like tension or migraine headaches, rheumatic and arthritis conditions as well as heartburn are all more common in women. Pain may make it harder to fall asleep or lead to nighttime or early morning awakenings. The rise and fall of hormone levels each month – especially the major changes that occur with pregnancy and menopause – can create special sleep problems for females. For example, 50 percent of menstruating women report bloating that disturbs their sleep, according to the NSF's Women and Sleep Poll. Many women get too little sleep as a result of busy, stressful lives. Other factors that influence sleep are mood, illness, medications, diet, lifestyle, and the sleep environment.

Sleep is as essential for your well-being as food and water. A short bout of insomnia is generally nothing to worry about. Chronic sleep loss, however, can contribute to health problems such as weight gain, high blood pressure, diabetes, and a decrease in the body's immune system. Here are at least six reasons why you should get enough sleep:

Learning and memory

We used to think that sleep was a passive activity. We now know that our brains are very active during sleep, and that sleep is necessary for our nervous systems to work properly. Too little sleep leaves us drowsy and unable to concentrate well. It leads to impaired memory and a reduced ability to carry out math calculations. Sleep helps the brain commit new information to memory through a process called memory consolidation. Nerve signaling patterns generated during the day while learning are repeated during the night. This pattern repetition may help encode memories and improve learning. People who slept after learning a new task did better when they were tested later.

Metabolism and weight

Deep sleep coincides with the brain's release of growth hormones leptin and cortisol. These powerful chemicals help regulate appetite and affect the way we process and store carbohydrates. Sleep deprivation alters these hormone levels resulting in increased appetite and higher blood sugar. Excess blood sugar promotes the overproduction of insulin, which promotes the storage of body fat causing weight gain. It also leads to insulin resistance, a critical feature of adult onset diabetes. The Harvard University's Nurses Health Study showed that participants who slept less than five hours per night had an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes – the kind that is related to body weight. German researchers confirmed in a study of 8,000 men and women that sleeping difficulties were linked with an increased risk of obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

Safety

Sleep loss contributes to a greater tendency to fall asleep during the daytime. This makes us less productive at work and home and significantly increases the risk of a car accident. We are less attentive as drivers and our reaction times are not as good as when we are well rested. Driver fatigue is responsible for an estimated 100,000 motor vehicle accidents and 1,500 deaths each year. Sleep deprivation also magnifies alcohol's effects on the body, so a fatigued person who drinks will become much more impaired than they would be if well rested. According to researchers at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, one drink on five hours of sleep is as debilitating as six drinks on eight hours of sleep.

Mood

It is a common observation when dealing with kids that have too little sleep can result in irritability. It happens to adults too, along with impatience, inability to concentrate, and moodiness. It adds to the confusion and impairment caused by Alzheimer's disease and makes depression worse. When you're overtired, you don't have the energy to do the things you like to do, the things that stimulate and motivate you.

Cardiovascular health

Serious sleep disorders have been linked to the development of high blood pressure and an irregular heartbeat pattern called atrial fibrillation. Chronic sleep deficiency causes an increase in stress hormones associated with more heart attacks and stroke. Women who only get six hours of shut-eye a night raise their chance of developing heart disease by 30 percent over those who snooze for an optimal eight hours, according to a study at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

Immune function

Sleep deprivation alters immune function making you more susceptible to infections like colds and flu. Studies show that people who are better rested may fight cancer better. ▶

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Sleep loss is a common problem for women in America. Lack of sleep is a source of stress that is detrimental at best and deadly at worst. Each year ten million people in the United States receive prescription drugs to aid sleep, but that's not a good long-term solution. If you're not sleeping well, it's almost inevitable that you will eventually develop some health problems because your brain and your body need sleep to regenerate. So what's a gal to do? Here are some tips from the National Sleep Foundation for improving your nighttime sleep:

1. Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule including weekends. Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in our brain. A regular waking time in the morning strengthens the circadian function and can help with sleep onset at night. If possible wake up with the sun, or use very bright lights in the morning. Sunlight helps the body's internal biological clock re-set itself each day. Sleep experts recommend exposure to an hour of bright morning sunlight for people having problems falling asleep.
2. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine. Avoid arousing activities before bedtime like paying bills, engaging in competitive games, or family problem solving. Some studies confirm that soaking in a warm bath or hot tub can ease the transition into deep sleep. Reading a book or your current issue of *Womeninc* magazine while listening to soothing music is also helpful. ▶ *continued on page 34*

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She knew it would be there

We planned our visit just before Christmas
For it is an annual thing
We call to see if she would like some visitors
For we have a gift to bring.

It will be our gift of Swedish custom
A bundle of oats to be tied to a tree
She opens the door and sends greetings
She welcomes both my wife and me.

She ushers us into her parlor
With the fireplace burning so bright
She is listening to classical music
So appropriate for this winter night.

Suddenly she rises from her chair by the fire
She had something she wanted to share
She moves to a window and pulls up the shade
She knew it would be there.

The Western sky was alive with color
She knew it would be there this time of day
It covers the vast horizon
There was nothing she had to say.

She had shared the view from her window
She wanted others to see
There is beauty on what could be lonely prairie
Something to share with my wife and me.

We left filled with a love for this woman
She had taught us a thing or two
We knew she appreciated our coming
And that it was the right thing to do.

Written By: Darwin R. Anthony, December 22, 2005



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3. Create a sleep environment that is dark, quiet, cool, and comfortable. Make sure you have a good supportive mattress and pillows free of allergens that might cause upper respiratory congestion. Consider using blackout curtains, earplugs for a bed partner's snoring, or "white noise" devices like a fan.
4. Finish eating at least two to three hours before your regular bedtime. Avoid heavy meals and spicy foods before bed. Restricting fluids in the evening may prevent nighttime waking to go to the bathroom.
5. Exercising regularly makes it easier to fall asleep and contributes to sounder sleep. Finish your exercise at least three hours before bed to allow your body to cool down. A cooler body temperature is associated with sleep onset.
6. Avoid caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate) close to bedtime. It's a stimulant that can keep you awake. Some people find milk or herbal, non-caffeinated teas to be soothing and helpful. Also avoid alcohol close to bedtime. The traditional "night cap" initially acts as a sedative and may help people fall asleep. But alcohol interferes with chemicals in the brain that allow for continuous sleep. The result is repeated partial waking through the night leading to fewer hours of truly deep restful sleep.

Getting the right amount of sleep is vital. We've seen the harm that too little sleep can cause. If that's not enough to motivate you to increase your sleep time consider this – sleep can really be your 'beauty rest.' Getting eight hours of sleep per night helps to improve the texture and luminosity of your skin. When you do not get the required sleep your skin suffers. During the night, the skin is restored from the harmful effects of daily stress. This is especially noticeable in the fragile skin under the eyes. The under eye skin is almost 50 percent thinner than the skin on the face. Sleepless nights leave behind fine lines, dark circles or puffy bags. Cosmetic treatments can soften the effects of poor sleep, but cannot reverse the stress that a lack of sleep will do to the skin. Prevention is the best cure, whether for your skin, your heart, waistline, or memory and mood.

So tonight as you prepare to sleep, cozy up to that book with a warm cup of tea or use that quiet time to meditate or pray. Then, crawl in between the sheets and breathe in deeply, hold your breath a few seconds, and slowly exhale. Repeat this deep breathing a few times, and then drift off to sleep. The old adage is true; you need to get your beauty sleep. Sleep well and be healthy! *W*

Sleep well
& be healthy!