



# GOOD SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH

## GET THE REST YOU NEED

Nina Gallaresi, Executive Director, MHBP

**S**ometimes, the pace of modern life barely gives you time to stop and rest. It can make getting a good night's sleep on a regular basis seem like a dream. But sleep is as important for good health as diet and exercise. Good sleep improves your brain performance, mood, and health.

Not getting enough quality sleep regularly raises the risk of many diseases and disorders. These range from heart disease and stroke to obesity and dementia.

There's more to good sleep than just the hours spent in bed, says Dr. Marishka Brown, a sleep expert at NIH. "Healthy sleep encompasses three major things," she explains. "One is how much sleep you get. Another is sleep quality—that you get uninterrupted and refreshing sleep. The last is a consistent sleep schedule."

People who work the night shift or irregular schedules may find getting quality sleep extra challenging. And times of great stress—like the pandemic—can disrupt our normal sleep routines. But there are many things you can do to improve your sleep.

### SLEEP FOR REPAIR

Why do we need to sleep? People often think that sleep is just "down time," when a tired brain gets to rest, says Dr. Maiken Nedergaard, who studies sleep at the University of Rochester. "But that's wrong," she says. While you sleep, your brain is working. For example, sleep helps prepare your brain to learn, remember, and create.

Nedergaard and her colleagues discovered that the brain has a drainage system that removes toxins during sleep. "When we sleep, the brain totally changes function," she explains. "It becomes almost like a kidney, removing waste from the system."

Her team found in mice that the drainage system removes some of the proteins linked with Alzheimer's disease. These toxins were removed twice as fast from the brain during sleep. Everything from blood vessels to the immune system uses sleep as a time for repair, says Dr. Kenneth Wright, Jr., a sleep researcher at the University of Colorado. "There are certain repair processes that occur in the body mostly, or most effectively, during sleep," he explains. "If you don't get enough sleep, those processes are going to be disturbed."

### SLEEP MYTHS AND TRUTHS

How much sleep you need changes with age. Experts recommend school-age children get at least nine hours a night and teens get between eight and 10. Most adults need at least seven hours or more of sleep each night.

There are many misunderstandings about sleep. One is that adults need less sleep as they get older. This isn't true. Older adults still need the same amount. But sleep quality can get worse as you age. Older adults are also more likely to take medications that interfere with sleep.

Another sleep myth is that you can "catch up" on your days off. Researchers are finding that this largely isn't the case. "If you have one bad night's sleep and take a nap, or sleep longer the next night, that can benefit you," says Wright. "But if you have a week's worth of getting too little sleep, the weekend isn't sufficient for you to catch up. That's not a healthy behavior."

In a recent study, Wright and his team looked at people with consistently deficient sleep. They compared them to sleep-deprived people who got to sleep in on the weekend. Both groups of people gained weight with lack of sleep. Their bodies' ability to control blood sugar levels also got worse. The weekend catch-up sleep didn't help.

On the flip side, more sleep isn't always better, says Brown. For adults, "if you're sleeping more than nine hours a night and you still don't feel refreshed, there may be some underlying medical issue," she explains.

### SLEEP DISORDERS

Some people have conditions that prevent them from getting enough quality sleep, no matter how hard they try. These problems are called sleep disorders.

The most common sleep disorder is insomnia. "Insomnia is when you have repeated difficulty getting to sleep and/or staying asleep," says Brown. This happens despite having the time to sleep and a proper sleep environment. It can make you feel tired or unrested during the day. Insomnia can be short-term, where people struggle to sleep for a few weeks or months. "Quite a few more people have been experiencing this during the pandemic," Brown says. Long-term insomnia lasts for three months or longer.

Sleep apnea is another common sleep disorder. In sleep apnea, the upper airway becomes blocked during sleep. This reduces or stops airflow, which wakes people up during the night. The condition can be dangerous. If untreated, it may lead to other health problems.

If you regularly have problems sleeping, talk with your health care provider. They may have you keep a sleep diary to track your sleep for several weeks. They can also run tests, including sleep studies. These look for sleep disorders.

## GETTING BETTER SLEEP

If you're having trouble sleeping, hearing how important it is may be frustrating. But simple things can improve your odds of a good night's sleep. Treatments are available for many common sleep disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy can help many people with insomnia get better sleep. Medications can also help some people.

Many people with sleep apnea benefit from using a device called a CPAP machine. These machines keep the airway open so that you can breathe. Other treatments can include special mouthguards and lifestyle changes. For everyone, "as best you can, try to make sleep a priority," Brown says. "Sleep is not a throwaway thing—it's a biological necessity."

## ADDITIONAL MHBP RESOURCES TO ASSIST YOU

MHBP has extensive resources to assist you in supporting healthy sleep!

Our Enhanced Maternity program provides trusted information and guidance about family planning, maternity support and postpartum care, including access to sleep coaches.

MHBP offers a Lifestyle and Condition Coaching Program, provides you or your covered dependents personalized support that helps you manage existing conditions, including how to improve your sleep. Our Health Coach will partner with you to transform your health goals into action. To get started with Health Coaching call toll-free at 866-533-1410.

MHBP covers, when medically necessary, polysomnography (sleep studies). If you have any questions or would like more information, please call MHBP at 800-410-7778.

## SOURCES:

- National Institutes of Health: <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/>
- MHBP.com



## UPDATE ON POSTAL SERVICE HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM (PSHBP)

Beginning January 1, 2025, Postal Service Active Employees and Annuitants will receive their medical health benefits through the Postal Service Health Benefits Program (PSHBP), which is a separate subset of the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHB), although it will still be administered through Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

### NEWEST INFORMATION

The newest updates about the PSHBP are available through [LiteBlue.usps.gov](https://www.liteblue.usps.gov) and [KeepingPosted.org](https://www.keepingposted.org)

### WILL MHBP BE A HEALTH PLAN IN PSHBP?

Great news, MHBP is part of the Postal Service Health Benefits Program. MHBP offers the same three Plan Options in the Postal Service Health Benefits Program that we have now: Standard Option, Value Plan and Consumer Option. MHBP is your Union-sponsored health plan and Mail Handlers can count on MHBP to support their health!

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PSHBP?

Each Local Union has designated specific Union Members to be a key contact in relaying information and questions about the program. In addition, MHBP's website contains up to date information from the Postal Service on educational materials and resources for the program at [www.mhbp.com/postal-service-health-benefits-program](https://www.mhbp.com/postal-service-health-benefits-program)

For specific questions, get answers in writing by emailing [retirementbenefits@usps.gov](mailto:retirementbenefits@usps.gov) Finally, to ask questions by phone, the Postal Service has a PSHBP Navigator Line 833-712-PSHB (7742).

### WHEN DO I NEED TO DO SOMETHING?

Open Season 2024 occurs November 11, 2024 – December 9, 2024, when all Postal Service Active Employees and Annuitants can select or change a medical insurance plan in PSHBP.