

# The importance of sleep.

Hokesen News Letter, No. 242

March 12, 2024

Health Care Center, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Yasuhiro Yamauchi, MD, PhD

Sleep is an extremely important part of our life that is essential for us to live. Sleep allows us to rest from physical activity and recover from physical fatigue. At the same time, it helps us recover from daily stress and psychological fatigue. Furthermore, in terms of learning, it helps consolidate and strengthen memory, and increases the ability to adapt to our environment. In addition, it is involved in autonomic nervous system regulation during sleep, affecting various physical and psychological functions such as cardiovascular function, metabolic/endocrine function, immune function, and deeply supports all aspects of our life.

On the other hand, in a state of sleep deprivation, recovery from fatigue is incomplete, resulting in daytime sleepiness, decreased activity, concentration, and judgment. In addition, prolonged sleep deprivation can lead to an increase in symptoms such as headaches and heart palpitations, leading to mood and emotional instability. From a long-term perspective, chronic sleep deprivation is deeply related to lifestyle-related diseases, increasing the risk of developing obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cerebrovascular disorders, and is also associated with a worsening of these conditions. Also, it has been shown to be associated with increased mortality. So, it is very important to consciously try to get an appropriate amount of sleep regularly.

The appropriate amount of sleep varies from person to person and changes depending on age (life stage), but for adults, approximately 6 to 8 hours per night is considered appropriate, and it is recommended to aim to sleep for at least 6 hours every night.

In addition, a “restful sleep” (the feeling of being well-rested after sleep) is related to the stability of physical and psychological conditions, and from a health perspective it is very important to increase your rates of restful sleep. It has been reported that factors that reduce restful sleep include lack of sleep, stress during the day, eating right before bed or disordered eating habits, lack of exercise, and having a chronic disease. To improve your restful sleep, it is important to reconsider your lifestyle habits.

It is said that there are many people who have a habit of “catching up on sleep” to make up for the lack of sleep on weekdays by sleeping for longer on the weekends, but it is actually impossible to catch up on sleep. If you need to catch up on sleep on your days off, it's a sign that you don't sleep enough on weekdays, so it's important to reconsider your lifestyle so you can get enough sleep on weekdays.

You should also avoid using your sleep time to study instead. “Lack of sleep” prevents the brain from recovering from fatigue, reduces concentration, and impairs decision-making. It is also not recommended from the perspective of memory retention. It is recommended that you ensure that you get enough sleep to consolidate your memory and restore your brain to a good state before studying. Even on days when you don't have enough time, try to organize your schedule to make the most of your available time without feeling the need to cut back on your sleep time.

If you experience poor sleep (difficulty falling asleep or waking up in the middle of the night) or a decreased feeling of restful sleep for an extended period of time, a sleep disorder may be the cause behind the symptom. Additionally, if you feel sleepy or fall asleep during the day, or are unable to wake up at socially acceptable times, you may have a sleep disorder. If your symptoms persist even after you have reconsidered your lifestyle habits that affect your sleep (including your sleeping environment and indulgences) and have tried to improve them, please consult a doctor in a medical institution.

If you have any questions, please consult with the Health Care Center, TUFS.

#### Reference

Guidelines for sleep for health promotion 2023/ 健康づくりのための睡眠ガイド 2023 (案)  
<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/10904750/001181265.pdf>