



## Getting enough sleep to be healthy and productive at work

The National Sleep Foundation recommends that adults get seven to nine hours of sleep per night to be well-rested; however, according to a report by RAND Corporation, more than a quarter of Canadians get fewer than seven hours of sleep per night. It's not surprising that people are getting less than the recommended amount of sleep in today's society—which features longer work hours, increased demands and stress, decreased physical activity, unbalanced diets and the excessive use of electronic devices.

### The importance of sleep

According to the National Institutes of Health, getting enough quality sleep at the right times is important for your mental and physical health, safety and quality of life. It's also important for optimal learning and productivity. While you're sleeping, your body carries out a number of vital tasks such as

- cultivating the pathways in your brain necessary to learn, create memories, make decisions and be creative,
- healing and repairing your heart and blood vessels,
- allowing your immune system to defend your body against foreign or harmful substances, and
- maintaining a healthy balance of the hormones that make you feel hungry and full, which help you control your weight.

### The impact of sleep deficiency

Insufficient sleep, even on a single night, has a number of immediate consequences the following day. These include lower alertness, a negative mood, reduced motor and visual acuity, longer response times and impaired attention and memory. Sleep deficiency can interfere with performance at work or school, social functioning and driving, which increases your risk of serious or fatal accidents or injury. Ongoing sleep deficiency is linked to many chronic health problems including obesity, high blood pressure, kidney disease, diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

Sleep issues also have a significant impact on employers—both through the cost of benefits and reduced employee productivity. According to the report by Rand Corporation, about 600,000 working hours are lost every year in Canada to inadequate sleep, the result of which is employees who are too tired to work as efficiently as they normally do or who miss work to catch up on sleep.

### Why am I not getting enough sleep?

A number of individual lifestyle and workplace factors are associated with insufficient sleep including gender, body mass index, smoking, consumption of sugary drinks, lack of physical activity, stress and anxiety, unrealistic time pressures at work, working irregular hours and long commute times. Insufficient sleep can also be a cause of behavioural habits such as exercising too close to bed time or using electronic devices immediately before bed.

In some cases, insufficient sleep or sleep deprivation can be the result of medical and psychological conditions such as insomnia, which is characterized by difficulties sleeping at night, or sleep apnea, which results in a reduction of the air flow into your lungs while you sleep. Psychosocial stress and other symptoms of psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety, also contribute to insufficient sleep.

### How can I improve my sleep?

It's important to understand that you cannot "catch up" on sleep or store sleep for the future because lost sleep on any given night has immediate consequences for the very next day. One night of increased sleep may not correct multiple nights of inadequate sleep.

To improve your ability to fall asleep, the quality and quantity of your sleep and your daytime alertness, you can apply healthy practices and habits—also known as sleep hygiene—to your daily life.

Listed below are some examples of healthy sleep habits. You can view more healthy sleep habits in our [infographic](#).

- Make sleep a priority and aim to get at least seven hours of sleep per night.
- Avoid heavy meals and alcohol too close to bed time. You should also avoid stimulants like nicotine and caffeine in the later afternoon and evening.
- Avoid bright artificial light, including screens on electronic devices, an hour before bed.
- If you don't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something relaxing like read a book or listen to soft music. Don't go back to bed until you're sleepy.

Practicing good sleep habits can help you improve your health and reduce your risk of the consequences associated with insufficient sleep. If practicing sleep hygiene isn't improving

your sleep—or you think you might be suffering from a sleep problem or disorder—talk to your doctor. There are various treatments available to help manage and treat sleep issues.

## How employers can promote healthy sleep

Employers can also play a significant role in supporting sleep health and reduce the impacts of workplace-related stress on sleep. For example, they can do the following:

- allow employees to have flexible scheduling or work from home;
- avoid unrealistic time pressures for employees as much as possible;
- discourage the excessive use of electronic devices outside of working hours;
- incorporate sleep health into workplace wellness initiatives through the use of incentives and wearable devices, like Fitbits, that can monitor sleep and physical activity levels; or
- provide nap or quiet rooms in the workplace.

By promoting healthy sleep, employers can improve the health and well-being of their employees, improve productivity and—by extension—contribute to overall economic growth.

## Learn more

### [Canadian Sleep Society—Resources](#)

Patient information brochures by Canadian experts.

### [What are sleep deprivation and deficiency?](#)

An article from the National Institutes of Health on sleep deficiency including why sleep is important, signs and symptoms of sleep problems and strategies for getting enough sleep.

### [Why sleep matters – the economic costs of insufficient sleep](#)

A research report from RAND Corporation based on a cross-country analysis of the economic consequences of sleep deprivation.

### [How businesses can take the lead in getting people to sleep more](#)

An article from RAND Corporation's blog that discusses how employers can support the sleep health of employees.

