

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Sleep is what most of us look forward to at the end of a long day. Unfortunately, many of us are not getting enough. While there is still a lot to learn about sleep and its role in our wellbeing, we are now beginning to understand its major impact on the health and destiny of our brains.

So how does sleep actually affect our brains? It turns out that sleep may play a unique role in the development of Alzheimer's disease. The quality of your daily sleep may in fact increase or decrease your risk for Alzheimer's. And so important these days, we know that quality sleep is fundamentally important for a healthy immune system. So, it is certainly clear why it is so important to prioritize shuteye each day!

Sleep does a whole lot more than influence your risk for Alzheimer's disease. It appears to affect your hunger, your metabolic rate, your weight, your immune system and even the compassion you feel for others! These effects involve our thinking, choices, and emotional state. This means that sleep influences many aspects of our brain function.

With the hectic pace of modern-day life, sleep might feel like a luxury you cannot afford. However, from a medical perspective, it is absolutely essential to get good sleep if you want to keep your body and brain healthy.

STEP 1: MAINTAIN A SLEEP SCHEDULE THAT ALLOWS FOR 7 TO 9 HOURS OF SLEEP

Having a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, even on the weekends, is one of the most important steps to mastering a perfect night of sleep. This step is vital because it helps set the pace of your body's circadian rhythm. When you wake up, the light comes into your eyes and resets that rhythm every single morning. If you do this consistently, your brain will know what to do and when to do it every single day. Try and stick to one sleep schedule seven days a week, and you will be well on your way to better sleep.

STEP 2: STOP CAFFEINE BY 2:00 PM

You might want to reach for the pot of coffee when the afternoon slump hits around 2:30 PM but doing so may impact the quality of your sleep. Remember, the half-life of caffeine is 6 to 8 hours, so stopping caffeine by 2:00 PM is important if you're planning a bedtime that's around 10:00 P.M. or earlier.⁴ In other words, an 8 oz cup of coffee has around 100 mg of caffeine, so having a coffee at 4:00 pm means you will still have 50mg of caffeine in your system at 10:00 P.M!

STEP 3: EXERCISE REGULARLY

Getting exercise during the day can help strengthen your circadian rhythm, promote daytime alertness, and even help you feel sleepy when it is time to turn out the lights. However, it may be best to avoid exercise right before bedtime. This is because intense physical activity can raise your body temperature and disrupt sleep. When possible, try to get your exercise completed at least 4 hours before bedtime, which will give you time to relax before bed.

STEP 4: GET SUNLIGHT IN THE MORNING

Believe it or not, sunlight stops the release of melatonin in your brain. This helps the brain and body to wake up and regulates your circadian rhythm. It is incredibly easy to take advantage of this information. In the first 30 minutes after you wake up, try to walk outside, or go to a window for some direct sunlight.

STEP 5: COOL YOUR ROOM TO BETWEEN 65°F AND 75°F AT NIGHT

Your sleep cycle follows your core body temperature cycle. In the evening, your temperature falls. This drop is a signal to your brain that it is time to sleep. Sleeping in a cooler environment encourages this process, helping you get to sleep quicker and easier.

STEP 6: AVOID BLUE LIGHT AT NIGHTTIME

Blue light emitted by electronic devices like cell phones, TVs, and computers blocks your brain's production of the hormone melatonin.¹³ In a nutshell, this means too much exposure to blue light too close to bedtime can make falling asleep quite difficult. If you cannot avoid screens late at night, try wearing blue light blocking glasses for 2 to 3 hours before you go to sleep.

Always check with your medical professional for direction and guidance if you are not getting the quality of sleep that you need.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!

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