

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

## What happens when we sleep?

While you sleep, your body and mind remain at work as many important processes take place. For instance, short-term memories are converted into long-term memories in a process called **memory consolidation**. A study at Harvard University showed that people who slept after learning a task performed better when tested.



Sleep also helps your body **physically restore** itself. During sleep your body's growth hormone production reaches its peak. This hormone speeds the absorption of nutrients and amino acids into your cells and aids the healing of tissues throughout your body. Growth hormone also stimulates your bone marrow, where your immune system cells are born. Producing growth hormone is especially important for children and one of the reasons kids sleep more than adults.

## Improve your sleep, improve your life

- Make sleep a priority: Try to get as close to **8 hours of sleep** per night if possible.
- Develop a relaxing bedtime routine
- Keep stress out of the bedroom. Write down any worries on paper and handle them after you wake up.
- Avoid exercise, caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine within a few hours of bedtime.
- Try not to use electronics (computers, smartphones, etc.) before bed, as they have an alerting effect that can make it difficult for you to fall asleep.

## Remedies to help you sleep

Many 'natural' **sleep aids** claim to help you fall asleep faster, but it is more likely that they allow the body to feel more relaxed, promoting sleep. These products include:

- Chamomile tea
- Melatonin, a naturally-occurring hormone
- Lavender-based products

Any sleep aid (herbal, natural or medication) should only be considered for use as a short-term help with sleep. Consult your doctor for information on possible side effects.

## Consequences of sleep loss

- Two hours of sleep loss creates the same performance impairment as drinking 2-3 alcoholic beverages.
- **Fatigue** as a result of lost sleep degrades these and other performance factors by 20-50%:
  - Reaction time
  - Communication
  - Attention and vigilance
  - Mood
- **Chronic sleep deprivation** puts you at a greater risk for a number of health problems, including:
  - Obesity
  - Hypertension
  - Heart disease
  - Mood disorders
- Sleep deprivation suppresses immune function, making you more susceptible to bacteria and viruses.



*“Sleeping is no mean art: for its sake one must stay awake all day.” – Friedrich Nietzsche*