

Why Sleep Deprivation Is Self-Torture!

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Depriving yourself of good quality and adequate quantity of sleep is a form of self-harm or self-torture and many are doing this to themselves, on a daily basis, by keeping awake longer than required and habitually sleeping in the early hours of the morning. In essence, individuals who 'were able, but unwilling to sleep' will go on to suffer from insomnia.

For many, sleep deprivation is induced

by lifestyle choices and sleep habits such as consumption of stimulating substance (like caffeine, nicotine and alcohol), delayed sleep, shift work, daytime naps, and working in the evening or late into the night. For others, it may be secondary to a host of emotional, physical (pain, sinus problems, breathing difficulties and heart problems etc.) and psychological problems (stress, anxiety and depression).

Why Do We Torture Ourselves?

Our fast-paced techno-driven busy lives are marred by distractions and discontentment. We unduly strive (for everything) and are seldom satisfied. Therefore, setting higher expectations from self and others inadvertently enhances pressure and stress.

We live by a myth that sleeping an hour less will give us an extra hour of productivity or allow us to catch up

with other things. But even after the demands for that extra work or study or caring has settled, many don't return to their natural required sleeping pattern, choosing instead to engage in purposeless digital activity that eats into precious sleep time. Further, many habitually sleep late as their 'virtual life' (updating or chatting on social media) has taken over real life rest time. Perhaps, this self-induced torture is reinforced by a lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of the body rhythm and sleep-wake cycle.

Is Sleep More Important Than Food?

Undoubtedly! If you fast or starve for a few days or a week, then at the end of it, you would be famished, weak and maybe a little thinner. That's it. Do the same with sleep by depriving yourself for few days or a week and you would be muddled, confused, almost unable to function.

Though many of the adverse effects of sleep deprivation may be invisible, research evidence suggests that sleep deprivation can affect your health (physical and psychological) including a negative impact on thinking capacity and productivity. For example,



inadequate sleep profoundly damages our ability to consolidate and stabilize learning and disturb our concentration. Research has also established that long-term sleep deprivation can cause panic attacks, anxiety, depression and increase the risk for ailments such as diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke and heart diseases.

How Much Sleep Do We Need?

There isn't a clear definition of exactly how long a person must go without sleep to be considered sleep deprived. However, research suggests that a person is deemed as sleep-deprived if he/she gets less sleep than they require to feel alert and awake. In other words, they need to sleep as much as is needed to wake up rested and refreshed.

Studies report that 95 per cent people need about seven to eight hours sleep per night. Two and a half per cent people need more than eight hours and two and a half per cent people require less than seven hours (that's one in forty people).

Advisory For Healthier Sleep

- ◆ Prioritize sleep over every other less relevant aspect of your night and life
- ◆ Maintain a sleep schedule - sleeping and waking at the same time, even during weekends will help regulate your body clock
- ◆ Wrap up everything at least 45 minutes before you turn off the lights. Skip the smartphone, computer and other bright screens as it confuses the brain and is a recipe for wakefulness!
- ◆ Avoid mind stimulating drinks such as coffee/tea/fizzy drinks/nicotine and alcohol
- ◆ Avoid daytime or afternoon naps



- ◆ If possible, avoid rotating shift work and/or consistently working or studying late at night
- ◆ Create a ritual around drinking a cup of herbal tea, milk or listening to soft music that helps you relax, or even reading a dull book that will put you to sleep!
- ◆ Exercise is an established wellness recipe. So 45 to 60 minutes of exercise, even walking or light exercise is best.
- ◆ Ideally, morning or early evening *yoga* with meditation will keep the body active and empty the mind as *yoga* is known to be effective in combating insomnia, stress and depression.

If there is one thing that you must try to do well in any given 24 hours, is to sleep well and that means you must commit at least one third (eight hours) of those 24 hours for sleeping, because you need to remember that sleeping is more important than food!

Health Tip

At the end of the day, the time spent in bed is time well spent but ensure it is restful, not restless and remember that your sleep and health must take priority over everything else.