

Risks of Sleep Deprivation

Research has shown that sleep is essential to good health. While we can skimp on sleep for a short while without major complications, sleep deprivation of any kind has an effect on the body.

Sleep Deprivation and Mental Health

Sleep is how the mind rests from the rigors of the day. Without it, mental function suffers.

- Lack of sleep causes confusion, distortion of memory and decreased mental capacity.
- A number of studies found that poor sleeping patterns can cause depression later in life. Not only can lack of sleep contribute to depression risk, but depression itself can cause changes to sleep patterns. A depressed person may experience difficulty getting off to sleep coupled with early morning waking.
- Long-term insomnia means that individuals are more susceptible to reacting badly to stressors. This increases the risk of developing mental illness. Studies report insomniacs are 3 times more likely to have a mental disorder.
- Many of those with chronic insomnia have been known to turn to substance abuse for help.

Sleep Deprivation and Physical Health

By staying awake, we are asking our bodies to perform beyond their capabilities. This places stress and strain on every portion of the physical body. Organs and systems are forced to work when they should be resting. This gives the body no time to heal itself in preparation for its next work period. Constant stress on the body affects our overall health and wellbeing.

Other physical dangers of sleep deprivation include:

- Wear and tear on the vital organs and systems of the body.
- Diminished muscle strength and endurance.
- Heightened sensitivity to pain.
- Increased appetite, which can lead to excessive weight gain.



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- Disruption of circadian rhythms, the natural changes your body undergoes throughout the day—night shift workers, who regularly experience this, are reported to live shorter lives than those who work during daytime hours.
- Disruption of insulin production and sugar metabolism, increasing risk of diabetes. A study by the University of Buffalo in 2009 found that participants who slept for less than six hours a night were up to five times more likely to have impaired fasting glucose levels; this is often viewed as a precursor to developing type two diabetes.
- Increased risk of coronary heart disease and other serious health conditions.
- An increased potential for accidents for those who suffer with chronic insomnia.
- Weakened immune system, which decreases defenses against illness.

Effects of Sleep Deprivation on Caregivers

Aside from the increased risk for various mental and physical health problems, sleep deprivation for caregivers can have other noticeable consequences:

- Tiredness makes it harder for individuals to find enjoyment in life. If people are tired all the time, they don't want to do anything. Maintaining a social life can be difficult due to a lack of energy.
- Poor concentration.
- Inability to perform tasks or process information easily and quickly.
- Decreased deftness of repetitive and perceptual skills.
- Impaired performance; industrial and road traffic accidents are more likely to occur when someone is tired, for example.

Contact Live Free Home Health Care to find out more information on how to get a healthy, restful night's sleep and to learn about respite care and how we can help a family caregiver avoid the complications of sleep deprivation.