

Can You Repay Your Sleep Debt?

Too many of us don't get enough sleep each night. If you get less than what your body needs for optimal health, you have a sleep debt.

We have all felt sluggish, irritable, hungry, or unable to focus during the day. *Sleep is a luxury*, you tell yourself. *I'll catch some zzz's this weekend*. But, can you really repay days, weeks or even years of sleep debt?



Click here or call the UHealth Sleep Center today: **(305) 243-ZZZZ (9999)**

While you may be used to compensating with coffee and energy drinks to feel more alert, there's not enough caffeine in the world to replace the restorative benefits of a good night's sleep.

What's a good night's sleep?

To think and feel your best, adults ages 18 to 64 need seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

Maintaining a consistent sleeping and waking schedule also helps you feel more rested throughout the day and makes falling and staying asleep easier.

If you've slept fewer than seven hours per night for years, it may take a few weeks to repay your sleep debt.

Why is sleep so important?

Sleep is a process that your body craves and needs to function, just like breathing,

eating, and drinking. Insufficient sleep or “sleep deprivation” leads to short- and long-term health problems.

“While awake, your brain builds up harmful waste products of metabolism, which are cleared only while you sleep,” explains Dr. Alejandro Chediak, a sleep expert with the University of Miami Health System. “Sleep loss allows the buildup of brain waste and interferes with basic brain functions.”

The circadian rhythm, which is your body’s clock, regulates not only your level of sleepiness but your body temperature, blood pressure, digestive enzymes and various hormones. With sleep loss and irregular sleep schedules—even by just an hour or two per night—your circadian clock gets off track.

Signs of sleep loss:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Inability to mentally focus
- Difficulty learning new things / processing information
- Bodily fatigue
- Emotional instability / crankiness
- Lack of coordination
- Compromised motor and driving skills / reaction time
- Lack of energy or stamina for exercise
- Increased hunger and cravings for sugary foods and carbohydrates (which can lead to weight gain)

According to the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, ongoing sleep loss (less than six hours of sleep per night) is linked to heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity and depression.

Can you make up sleep debt?

Yes. If you get 39 or fewer hours of sleep in one week, you have sleep deprivation. You need to get three to four extra hours of sleep over the course of a weekend, plus one to two extra hours of sleep every night for the following week to pay off that sleep debt.

If you've slept fewer than seven hours per night for years, it may take a few weeks of sufficient sleep to repay your sleep debt. Dr. Chediak recommends that people in this situation "begin by sleeping as long as you can." At first, you might find yourself sleeping for extended periods of time. But, "the brain will sleep only if it needs to," he says. Allowing your schedule and body to gain significant nighttime sleep will eventually enable you to settle your sleep debt.

"You'll know when your sleep debt is paid off when you awake feeling refreshed and are no longer excessively sleepy during the day," said Dr. Chediak.

If you backslide with some sleepless nights, try to use your weekends and 20-to-30-minute naps. Once you've repaid your sleep debt, you need to get enough sleep each night to continue the physical and mental health benefits only sleep can provide.

Dana Kantrowitz is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News.

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Research has shown that sleep deprivation may increase your risk for obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Now we have one more reason to make sleep a priority: a potential link between inadequate sleep and Alzheimer's disease, according to a recent study.

Not getting regular sleep? You may be putting your mental health at risk.

Our brain cells actively use energy to learn and think during the day, and toxins

build up. The study, published in the journal, *Science Advances*, describes the importance of sleep for clearing your brain of cellular waste.

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