

Are Your Sleep Habits Making You Sick?

BY TAMEKIA REECE

When you have things you need to catch up on, what do you do? Wake up earlier or hit the sack later? Between work, family and the ever-growing to-do list, most people aren't getting enough ZZZs. In fact, almost two-thirds of Americans say they aren't getting enough sleep during the week, according to the 2011 Sleep in America® poll by the National Sleep Foundation. Although losing a few hours of shut-eye occasionally may seem like no big deal, skimping on sleep can be hazardous to your health.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

Just like oil does for your car, your body needs sleep to function at its best ability. "Sleep regenerates everything in the body – from the immune system to the digestive system to the neurons in the brain," said Dr. Raza Pasha, M.D., founder of the Pasha Snoring and Sinus Center in Houston. "With adequate sleep, you feel better, you're more alert, you have more energy, better concentration, and you're generally much happier."

How much is enough? Everyone has different needs, but for adults, Pasha says it can be anywhere from six to 10 hours a night.

Your body tells you if you're not getting

enough sleep, adds Paul Fulmer, M.D., medical director of The Snoring Center's Houston office. "If you constantly feel tired, irritable, inattentive or you get that afternoon lull and need a boost to get through the day, you're probably sleep-deprived," he said.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Being sleep-deprived doesn't only wreak havoc on your appearance. In the short-term, inadequate sleep can be dangerous because fatigue makes you more prone to accidents – at home, during childcare, at work and while driving, Pasha said.

Short periods of sleep loss can also cause headaches, lower your libido, make you more susceptible to illness, and impair your memory and your ability to think and process information.

Also, sleep debt accumulates, Fulmer said. If you lose one hour of sleep each night, it adds up. "Eventually your body gets exhausted and can't tolerate it, so you crash," he said.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Getting more sleep will erase short-term side effects, but when you haven't been dozing enough for weeks, months or years, there can be serious health consequences. Chronic sleep deprivation causes your metabolism to slow down, which may cause weight gain, and you increase your risk of hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, Fulmer said. Persistent sleep problems may affect lung and mental health too, Pasha adds.

So, next time you consider skipping those 40 winks, don't. Sleep is the fuel that keeps your body going.

the healthy chef



JERRY JAN
HEAD SUSHI CHEF
RA SUSHI

When it comes to sushi, the sky's the limit. In fact, creating your own sushi roll is a lot like making a sandwich. There are countless ingredients, and each cleverly created roll is based on personal preference.

To make your own healthy sushi meal, I suggest starting with the freshest ingredients. You can find all you need at your local supermarket. Always pick fish that has a vibrant color, smooth texture and does not have any odor. Salmon, tuna and yellow fin tuna are all great choices for sushi because they are rich in essential vitamins and minerals and contain a variety of heart healthy oils like omega 3. Also, keep in mind that it's best to use ingredients the same day you purchase them.

Even though sushi is already healthy, there are some things you can do to ensure you are reaping all the benefits. First, stay away from fried rolls, mayonnaise and cream cheese. Second, use a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables; remember if you create your sushi roll with your favorite ingredients, then you can't go wrong. And lastly, when it comes to dipping sauce, use a low-sodium soy sauce, ponzu sauce or your favorite vinegar or citrus-based sauce. These sauces are a healthier alternative to regular soy sauce, and anything that contains vinegar or citrus undertones enhances sushi's flavor.

BY THE NUMBERS:

800,000: Number of Houstonians who suffer from some type of sleep related disorder, the most common is sleep apnea and snoring disorders.