

Feeling sick and tired ?

How chronic sleep deprivation may be affecting your health

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As a Nurse Practitioner and certified Health and Wellness coach I am passionate about helping people reach their goals by strengthening what I call the basic pillars of good health.

One of these pillars is Sleep.

This is a pretty common problem these days to not get enough of it , and you or someone you know may be suffering from health issues because of this. Sleep deprivation is a serious problem that over time has been linked to chronic illnesses and weight gain .

So why in all of history is this such a wide spread problem now ? We have the invention of the lightbulb to thank for that. Once people were able to just flick a switch on in the evening , and the light could stay on indefinitely , we started finding any number of reasons to prolong bedtime.

Over the past 100 + yrs sleep hours have decreased dramatically. In the 1900's the norm was 9 hours , now its less then 6 hours on average per night. That's a major difference .

How much sleep are we actually supposed to get ? According to the The American Sleep Association adults should be sleeping between 7-9 hours a night. However they report that in reality 50-70 million people currently have some sort of sleep disorder, with insomnia being the most common.

We know from research published by the National Institute of Health that 5 hours or less of sleep is linked to conditions like :

- 1) Obesity
- 2) Diabetes
- 3) Heart disease and hypertension
- 4) Increased Anxiety or Depression
- 5) Increase in alcohol use

It can even lower your immune system leaving us more susceptible to getting sick - and there are some researchers studying if sleep deprivation has an effect on DNA and may possibly be linked to cancer development .

I'd like to share with you my own personal story as an example that maybe some of you can relate to parts , or even all of it .

In 2012 I had started a new job with long hours that often extended into weekends and I also had young children ages 4 and 6yrs old . At this time I had a sister who was diagnosed with breast cancer and I began to become more and more involved with caring for her as her disease progressed.

Because of stress, worry and needing to keep up with my work, I began pushing my sleep time later and later just so I could fit in everything I needed to do. After awhile of this I noticed myself becoming forgetful, foggy headed and quite moody.

I found I needed more energy then normal to get through my day and was simultaneously getting hungrier. With my limited time I reached for all the easiest things to eat at work that were readily available . And I certainly didn't have enough energy to exercise. I found myself putting weight FAST. Ultimately I gained about 20lbs over the course of 2 yrs and I just didn't "feel" well.....

So what was really happening to me in this vicious cycle I was in ?

Well to start - the lack of sleep was disrupting my hormones .

Humans produce a hormone called cortisol that rises in the early morning and helps us to wake up and get going, and starts coming down at night.

We also have a hormone called melatonin that starts being produced after sunset with the darkness and helps us to sleep.

Nowadays , instead of going straight to sleep as nature intended , many of us now stay up late watching tv, working on our laptops or texting on our phones .

The light from our laptop and phones contains blue light and this suppresses the production of melatonin and keeps our cortisol levels up making it difficult to fall asleep.

Additionally there are two other hormone's that typically get affected : Leptin and Ghrelin. Leptin is responsible for feeling full , and Gherlin is responsible for feeling hungry . What happens when we lose sleep you guessed it ! They get out of whack also and our hunger increases while we take longer to feel satisfied.

The Mayo Clinic reports studies show that ppl who were sleep-deprived ended up eating an average of more then 500 extra calories each day - that could lead to as much as a pound a week if it goes on continuously .

Although I am only mentioning these 4 hormones , in reality all our hormones are disrupted because everything works together in harmony and once that's disturbed all hormones are effected.

Here is an interesting fact : women are more susceptible to sleep deprivation because our hormones naturally fluctuate during the month Other factors like cramping or caring for infants and young children can come into play and affect our sleep time. So that means we are more likely then men to suffer the consequences of related diseases and weight gain.

A study at Duke University found that women who are poor sleepers tended to be more overweight than men with sleep problems.

To make matters worse we tend to crave unhealthy, high-carbohydrate, and high-fat foods.

After telling you all this then the question becomes what can we do to help or improve the situation? There is actually a lot you can do to help achieve a healthy sleep cycle. I will give just 5 easy tips here and I invite you to try just one to start. You can always add on from there :

- Establish a regular bedtime and wake up time that allows for not less than 7 hours of sleep
- Control the lights : consider stopping blue light electronics 1-2 hours before bed or wear “blue blocker” shades in the evening. Also there’s a free app for your computer called F.lux that automatically turns on a blue light filter in the evening. Here is the link: <https://justgetflux.com>
- Avoid alcohol several hours before bed as this interferes with the deep REM stage of sleep
- If your a coffee drinker then stop drinking caffeine after 2pm , it is a stimulant with a 1/2 life of 8 hours - meaning after 2pm it will still be in your system at bedtime
- Stop eating heavy carbs 4 hours prior to bedtime as carb heavy meals result in major shifts in blood glucose within an hour of eating making it harder to sleep and forcing the body into a digestive state .This also avoids the carb crash that can happen after a heavy meal leaving you possibly waking up in the night hungry. Instead opt for healthy meals taken throughout the day that are higher in both fiber and protein which stabilize your blood sugar and curb your cravings. If you need to have a light snack before bed then make sure it is a low carb one.

In Summary with 85% of all doctors visits in this country now related to chronic illness we need to pay way more attention to the very foundations of health. More and more sleep is devalued and its become something of a badge of honor to say how much work we accomplished, with as little sleep as possible. It certainly has become the cultural norm ; in part I believe due to the amount of technology and global business of today's world that makes us accessible 24 hours a day. Its time we get back to the basics and take back our health.

