

# Sleep: CATCHING YOUR ZZZ'S



BY LISA J. HUNT, D.O.

Normal sleep consists of two main types of sleep: rapid-eye-movement (REM) and non-rapid-eye-movement (non-REM) sleep. REM sleep is most often associated with dreaming. These two types of sleep can be further broken down into the following stages.

**Stage 1:** *"Light sleep"*: During this phase, we drift in and out of sleep and can be awakened easily. Eye movement is slow and muscle activity slows.

**Stage 2:** *"Light sleep"*: Eye movements stop and brain waves slow with occasional bursts of rapid waves called sleep spindles. Adults spend half their sleep time in this stage.

**Stage 3:** *"Deep sleep"*: Delta waves appear (extremely slow brain waves) with smaller, faster waves.

**Stage 4:** *"Deep sleep"*: The brain produces mostly delta waves. During this phase, there are no eye movements and no muscle activity.

**Stage 5:** *"REM sleep"*: Dreams almost always happen in this phase, but may occur in other sleep stages as well. Breathing becomes more rapid, irregular and shallow. Also, there are rapid eye jerks and limb muscles become temporarily paralyzed. Adults spend approximately 20 percent of their sleep time in this phase. Infants start out spending about half their sleep time in REM sleep.

It takes approximately two hours to go through all five stages of sleep. Thereafter, these phases are usually repeated. REM sleep normally occurs 90 minutes after we fall asleep. Of note, older people spend less time in Stages 3 and 4 (deep sleep). Some elderly may not even experience the deep sleep phases at all.

Unfortunately, there is no absolute rule as to how much sleep is enough as everyone's requirements are uniquely different. Some people can function on as little as five hours per night while others require nine to 10 hours. The average need of most adults is approximately eight hours in order to function at their peak efficiency during the day. Children, especially very young children and adolescents, usually require more sleep than adults to be at their best. Regardless of how many hours of sleep you get each night, if you wake up easily in the morning (and rarely need an alarm clock), and can make it through the entire day without seeming to run out of energy or feeling drowsy after sitting quietly or reading for a while, you probably are getting enough sleep.

Insomnia is defined as habitual sleeplessness. Insomnia can take the form of being unable to fall asleep when first going to bed or waking during the night and being unable to get back to sleep. The prevalence of insomnia ranges from 10% to 30% among adults and increases with age and in the female gender. A lack of sleep can perpetuate serious illness and cause premature aging. Persistent insomnia significantly raises the risk of clinical depression, anxiety disorders and

substance abuse. Insomnia is associated with impairment of quality of life, increased risk of accidents, and decreased work productivity. Sleep is also needed to restore appetite hormones to their normal levels. Many obese people do not get at least eight hours of sleep a night. Studies have demonstrated that inadequate sleep can increase calorie intake from snacks by as much as 20 percent.

Millions of Americans consciously choose to skimp on their sleep in the mistaken belief that sleeping fewer hours allows them to be more productive. These people, however, are likely doing themselves a great deal of harm in the long run. These "night owls" who sleep less to accomplish more are actually less creative and less productive than those who get adequate amounts of sleep. Studies have shown that people who get seven to eight hours of sleep each night live longer, happier, healthier lives than those who skimp on their sleep.

One of the best remedies for insomnia is taking melatonin one hour before bedtime (check with your physician about proper dosage as range varies greatly). California poppy, hops, kava kava, lemon balm, passionflower, skullcap and valerian root are good herbs for helping to overcome insomnia (each can be taken in capsular or extract forms). However, it is best not to rely on one herb on a regular basis (rotate among several). When utilizing these herbs, they should be taken before bedtime. There are also many medication classes that can be used for insomnia. Consult your health care provider to consider the various treatment options for appropriate sleep issues. <sup>SM</sup>

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**DR. LISA HUNT**  
AT VALLEY WELLNESS CENTER

1300 Mable Ave., Ste C, Modesto  
209-577-2799  
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