



Busting myths about sleeping

From the elderly needing less sleep to oversleeping benefits, we bust popular misconceptions

Sleeping is a key part of staying healthy but many people aren't getting enough or are having too much. A recent study shows that having too much sleep could increase your chances of a stroke. So we bust myths and offer handy tips on how to make the most of your slumber.

MYTH: NAPS RUIN NIGHT-TIME SLEEP

FACT: Power napping during the day, a near-sleep state, can help you sleep better. This gives you confidence that you are able to power down your mind and body. It also helps unload the brain's working memory so there is less 'filing' to be done at night, which leads to deeper, more restorative sleep. A power nap should last no more than five to 20 minutes between 2-4pm.

MYTH: EIGHT HOURS IS ESSENTIAL

FACT: Some of us function well on just six to seven hours while others

need eight to nine. So when it comes to sleep, one size doesn't fit all. So if you are healthy and feel fine, stop worrying that you haven't had enough sleep.

MYTH: YOU CAN'T HAVE TOO MUCH

FACT: Sleeping for too long (more than 10 hours) is as damaging as getting less than six hours, scientists say.

Spending long periods lying down slows blood flow to organs and affects blood sugar levels raising the risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Going to bed and getting up at the same time every day programs your body to sleep better and is a good way to get adequate sleep.

MYTH: SLEEP IS NEEDED SO WE CAN SWITCH OFF

FACT: Our brains and bodies don't switch off. They are busy performing functions, like making memo-

ries, building bones, regenerating tissue, strengthening immunity, removing toxins and stabilising blood sugar.

MYTH: THE ELDERLY NEED LESS SLEEP

FACT: This is a common misconception. As we get older, sleep quality declines and we experience a change in sleep patterns - whether that's more frequent awakenings, loss of non-REM sleep or more naps.

MYTH: WORKOUT ALWAYS HELPS

FACT: Exercise is good for quality sleep but high-intensity exercise can be disruptive if done too close to bedtime.

MYTH: ALCOHOL HELPS

FACT: Too much alcohol can play havoc with sleep patterns especially late at night. It may help you fall asleep initially but will interrupt your sleep later and rob you of one of our most satisfying types of sleep,

where dreams occur as you are likely to wake up due to dehydration or for visiting the loo.

MYTH: WEEKEND CATCH-UP IS OKAY

FACT: It's impossible to catch up on missed sleep because you can't make up the quality. A long lie-in disturbs your biological clock and leaves you groggy so it's counter-productive.

The way around would be to go to bed earlier the following night instead but wake up at the same time every day regardless of when you went to sleep.

MYTH: AN HOUR BEFORE MIDNIGHT IS WORTH TWO AFTER

FICTION: While this isn't strictly true, it is based on the fact the first third of your sleep is the most restorative. It is the deepest part of sleep where we are least likely to be disturbed.