

July 23, 2012

Pillow talk

“Sleep requirement changes over the lifespan of an individual and wanes as the human brain matures,” says Dr Preeti Devnani, clinical director of a comprehensive Sleep Disorder Clinic in Mumbai and a consultant physician at the Department of Neurology, Clinical Neurophysiology and Sleep Medicine, Jaslok Hospitals, Mumbai.

“If you’re sleep-deprived, try to get that recovery sleep as soon as possible rather than allowing a sleep debt to accumulate throughout the week,” she says. “It is impossible to catch up only on weekends and the downside to sleeping excessively on weekend mornings is the dampening effect it can have on your homeostatic drive (sleep inducing drive) the following night. Also, gastrointestinal, metabolic and hormonal circadian patterns are affected by sleep loss.”

The exercise-sleep connection

If you don’t get enough sleep, then it’s best to avoid hitting the gym, because experts feel, exercise and sleep have a long-standing connection.

During sleep, important hormones involved in muscle growth, fat burning, bone building and tissue repair are released. Without these hormones, your body may find it unable to repair itself and recover from a strenuous workout.

If you exercise after a sleepless night, it will only add to your fatigue. “Exercising after acute sleep loss results in increased perception of exertion,” says Dr. Devnani. “Sleep loss alters the psychological response to exercise. It also diminishes the ability to produce peak power while exercising. Vertical jumping ability and isokinetic strength deteriorate with lack of sleep. Sleep deprivation can decrease energy levels, making it harder for you to have a good workout.”

Avoid cultivating the worst sleep habits

We know that we should eat at least an hour before we sleep and that ideally, the room should be dark, cool, comfortable and conducive to a good night's rest. But what are the worst sleep habits that you may be unknowingly bringing into your bedroom that can cause extreme insomnia?

“Avoid the electronic touch,” says Dr. Devnani. “This would include close proximity to your cellphone, laptop, iPad or any device that emits blue light. These devices engage people’s minds with their stimulating content and prevent them from drifting off. The use of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine from cigarette smoke; all these act as a stimulant as well. The brain requires deep ‘slow wave’ sleep in order to recharge itself and electronic devices and stimulants can interfere with that.”