How many hours of shut-eye did you get last night? Americans average about 6.8 hours of sleep at night—an hour less than the average from 1942. But our sleep needs haven’t changed. That means most of us are consistently getting less sleep than we need, putting our health in danger.

Sometimes it seems like we’re in a contest to see who can sleep the least. We wear our sleeplessness as a badge of honor. But not getting enough sleep is both unhealthy and unsafe.

Sleep deprivation hurts you and others

Sleep helps us think clearly, so we can assess risks and make good decisions. It also helps us learn and remember things, and react quickly when we need to. Getting less than eight hours of sleep leads to:

- Memory problems
- Poor judgment
- Trouble learning new things
- Slow response time
- More risk-taking
- Trouble paying attention

If you feel like an hour here or there doesn’t matter, think again. The single hour lost when Americans set their clocks forward for daylight savings time results in a 17% increase in traffic deaths on those Mondays, compared to the weeks before.

Tips for getting good sleep

- Keep a routine. Get up at the same time each morning, have meals at regular times, and go through the same bedtime ritual (bath, snack, book, etc.) each night. This keeps your body ready for sleep when it is bedtime.
- Make your bedroom a good place for sleep. Keep it quiet, cool and dark. Don’t eat, watch TV, write, talk on the phone or worry in bed. Once you get in bed, your mind should be off for the night.
- Be aware of what you put into your body and how it affects your sleep. Do not have any caffeine after lunch. Avoid alcohol (and heavy exercise) within six hours of your bedtime. Don’t smoke before bedtime, and keep any bedtime snacks light. Try to avoid using sleeping pills.

Sources

Over the course of days or weeks, not getting enough sleep is hard on your mind, your body and your bank account.2,3

- **You’re more likely to get sick.** Lack of sleep weakens the immune system.
- **You’re more likely to gain weight.** Sleep deprivation disrupts your metabolism. The less people sleep, the more likely they are to be overweight or obese, and to crave foods that are high in calories and carbohydrates.
- **You’re more likely to have trouble in your relationships.** Irritability and mood swings from not getting enough sleep make it hard for other people to be around you.
- **You’re more likely to lose weight.** People who don’t get enough sleep are at greater risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, depression and accidental death.
- **You’re less likely to do well at work or school.** Poor judgment and problems concentrating combined with an irritable mood is a recipe for failure at your job or at school.
- **You’re less likely to live to an old age.** People who don’t get enough sleep are at greater risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, depression and accidental death.

### Treatment for sleep problems

If you aren’t getting enough sleep, speak with your doctor. There are a lot of different treatments that can help.5

- **Bright light therapy.** Spending even a short amount of time each day in front of very bright lights can help to reset your internal “sleep clock.” This is helpful for people who have a hard time falling asleep until late at night, and then struggle to wake up in the morning.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).** A therapist can teach you ways to relax and deal with the anxiety of not being able to sleep. They will also help address the issues in your life that are causing your sleep problem.
- **Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP).** If you have obstructive sleep apnea, a mask that blows air into the back of your throat will help keep your airway open while you sleep.
- **Oral appliances.** Mouth guards like those worn for sports can protect your teeth if you grind them in your sleep. They may also help with snoring and obstructive sleep apnea.
- **Medications or nutritional supplements.** Medicines and nutritional supplements can help with some sleep problems.
- **Surgery.** Some sleep problems, like obstructive sleep apnea, may require surgery if other treatments don’t work.

### How much sleep do you need?6

It varies from person to person. But if you’re feeling drowsy during the day — even when you are bored — you haven’t had enough sleep.

- **Adults:** Most adults need seven to nine hours of sleep, although some people need as few as six or as many as 10 hours each day.
- **Children and teens:** On average, teens need eight and a half to nine and a half hours each day. School-aged children need nine to 10.
- **Pregnant women:** In their first three months of pregnancy, often need several hours more sleep each day than they needed before.

### Helpful resources

Visit WebMD’s Sleep Disorders Health Center for tips and tools to help you catch some Zzzs.

Visit anthem.com for more ways to get healthy — and stay healthy.