

# MAKE AMERICA *Healthier*

## THE PATH TO A HEALTHIER NATION

### The Health Benefits of Better Sleep

**THE ISSUE:** Sleep plays a critical—and often overlooked—role in our overall health. Sleep allows the body to perform many important functions.

- Every night, as you drift into the deep, restorative phase of sleep, your body becomes a healing powerhouse.
- Known as slow-wave sleep or Stage 3 non-REM sleep, this is when your body works tirelessly to repair and regenerate.
- Cells mend, muscles recover, and your immune system gets a boost, all while you're sound asleep.
- But it's not just your body that benefits—your brain is hard at work too, clearing out toxins and consolidating memories, ensuring you wake up sharp and ready to take on the day.
- This deep sleep is like a nightly reset button, balancing hormones that control hunger, stress, and metabolism—key players in the fight against obesity and chronic diseases.

Yet, for many of us, this vital deep sleep is in short supply. The relentless demands of everyday life can rob us of the deep, uninterrupted rest we need. When we skimp on sleep, especially deep sleep, we're not just tired—we're setting ourselves up for a cascade of health issues. From weight gain to weakened immunity, the ripple effects of poor sleep are far-reaching.

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#### THE CONCERNS:

Approximately **one in three** American adults fails to achieve the recommended seven hours of sleep each night. This isn't merely an inconvenience: **Studies** reveal that consistent sleep deprivation contributes to obesity rates and diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular issues.

- When sleep falls short, our appetite hormones—[ghrelin and leptin](#)—fall out of balance.
- Ghrelin, which signals hunger, surges, while leptin, which tells us we're full, drops.
- The outcome? An increased appetite and a tendency to overeat.
- In fact, studies show that the sleep-deprived, on average, consume an [additional 250 calories daily while burning only 100 more](#).
- Adults who sleep less than seven hours nightly face a [41% higher risk of obesity](#).

Beyond fueling obesity, sleep deprivation elevates blood pressure, disrupts blood sugar regulation, and heightens the risk of chronic illnesses.

- Obesity amplifies the odds of [type 2 diabetes](#) by up to sevenfold and paves the way for heart disease.
- Yet, even without weight gain, sleep loss wreaks havoc: A single night of sleep deprivation [can raise blood pressure](#), signaling cardiovascular strain.
- Sleep loss can also [impair glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity](#), increasing diabetes risk independently of body weight.

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## THE RISKS:

According to the [National Sleep Foundation](#), the amount of sleep a human being needs changes throughout their life. A newborn (0-3 months), for example, needs 14-17 hours a day, infants need between 12 and 15 hours, toddlers between 11 and 14 hours, and preschoolers between 10 and 13 hours. By school age (6-12 years), this has shortened to 9-11 hours. For teenagers, 8 to 10 hours was considered appropriate, 7 to 9 hours for young adults and adults, and 7 to 8 hours of sleep for older adults.

Unfortunately, research suggests that much of the population isn't consistently reaching these goals.

- [The CDC reports](#) that over 25% of adults fall short of sleep guidelines, with 14.5% struggling to drift off most nights.
- According to the [National Sleep Foundation](#), less than 2 out of 10 teens report getting the recommended amount of sleep on both school days and weekends.

- This goes beyond tired mornings—it hampers focus, emotional stability, and academic success.
  - ▢ In **research** highlighted by the National Sleep Foundation, girls who got on average less sleep than the recommended amount of 8-10 hours per night had significantly lower grades in mathematics compared to girls who got the recommended amount of sleep.
  - ▢ **The consequences extend further:** Insufficient sleep in youth correlates with behavioral challenges as well as laying a foundation for future health struggles like obesity and diabetes.

These early patterns burden healthcare systems and communities, driving up healthcare costs and diminishing productivity as sleep-deprived kids mature into adults. From classrooms to cubicles, this sleep crisis ripples out, hitting us where it hurts—our wallets and our well-being.

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**SOLUTIONS:** The path forward is within reach—prioritizing sleep can transform your health and the health of your family. Here's how to begin:

- **Establish a Routine:** Stick to consistent bed and wake-up times, even on weekends, to align your body's internal clock for better sleep and metabolism.
- **Optimize Your Space:** Craft a restful bedroom—dark, quiet, and cool.
- **Limit screen time:** Late-night Netflix binges are the enemy of healthy sleep habits. Blue light disrupts sleep patterns and is tied to weight gain. Work to keep screens out of the bedroom—especially for children.
- **Mind Your Meals:** Steer clear of heavy eating before bed, as it can disturb sleep and hinder weight management.
- **Ease Stress:** Combat stress—a notorious sleep disruptor—with practices like deep breathing, meditation, or gentle yoga.
- **Embrace Morning Light:** Exposure to natural sunlight during the day helps regulate your circadian rhythm, promoting restful nights.
- **Seek Expert Advice:** If sleep apnea—**prevalent in 20% of adults, with 90% undiagnosed**—is a concern, consult a physician for transformative solutions.

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