Better Sleep Boosts Overall Health And Well-Being

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O'FALLON, Ill. - The National Sleep Foundation, which launched Sleep Awareness Week in 1998, says 45% of Americans report poor or insufficient sleep negatively affects their daily lives.

Sleep Awareness Week, March 12-18, highlights the importance of good sleep. With everyone moving their clocks ahead one hour on Sunday, March 12, with the start of Daylight Saving Time, sleep schedules may be affected.

"Sleep is one of the pillars of a healthy lifestyle, along with a balanced diet and regular exercise," said Lia Turpin, a registered polysomnographic technologist at HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital's Sleep Disorders Center. "Sleep is when the brain and body disconnect from the senses, no longer allowing us to process information from the outside. In turn, sleep allows us to review activities and experiences from the day, which strengthens memory; gives our organs time to rest; allows our immune system to scan for infections and fight illnesses; and allows a child or teenager's muscles to grow."

According to Turpin, when our sleep health is optimal, our bodies function at a higher level, including mental and hormonal health. "Sleep also helps us think more clearly and creatively and improves mood," she said. Insufficient sleep can lead to health conditions such as irritability, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression and diabetes. There are more than 80 identified sleep disorders, and sometimes, the cause has nothing to do with actual lack of sleep - stress, depression, a change in family dynamics, a new career and other life adjustments can lead to trouble sleeping.

The term "sleep hygiene" refers to a series of healthy sleep habits that can improve your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep, including:

- Limit the use of electronics one hour prior to bed to prepare bodies and brains for sleep.
- Do not go to bed hungry.
- Keep the bedroom temperature cooler than the rest of the house.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol four to six hours before bedtime.
- If you don't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and do a quiet activity without a lot of light exposure until you feel sleepy.

Turpin advised that it's always best to stay in a routine when it comes to bedtime and wake time, especially with kids. "It's difficult to get kids to bed sometimes, so allowing them to stay up a bit later every now and then is okay but try not to deviate more than one hour."

If you have concerns about sleep patterns, or have difficulties falling or staying asleep, you may benefit from an evaluation by physicians at the Sleep Disorders Center. Sophisticated diagnostic equipment is used to non-invasively monitor brain, heart, respiratory and muscle activity during sleep. For more information on the Sleep Disorders Center in O'Fallon or to make an appointment, call 1-888-650-7474.

For more information about getting quality sleep, visit the [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#).