

Sleep and Rest – invigorate your body!

The Fifth Treasure

We live in a sleep-deprived world. With the presence of technology, 24-hour restaurants and cafes, online shopping right at your fingertips, videos on demand, games on demand, never-ending wifi, and internet connectivity, the list could go on. These are enough reasons for us not to sleep!

But why sleep? Do we really need it?

Well, there are many reasons why we need sleep, but most of all, insufficient sleep can lead to poor health outcomes (Chan, et. al, 2021). Other reasons why we need sleep are:

1. **Sleep brings healing.** Our body cannot operate 24/7 without rest. It is when one is asleep that the body takes care and restores its own organs and systems. Without rest, our system will fail.
2. **Sleep improves our daily performance.** When one has sufficient sleep, the daily performance of that person is enhanced to maximum capacity.
3. **Sleep restores the body's energy.** During the day, a person uses a lot of energy in working, studying, or just by being awake and being alive. Sleep restores the body's lost energy during the day.

Other benefits of sleep include: a. increases daytime alertness, b. Improves learning abilities, c. Improves resistance to disease, d. Slows down aging, e. Helps reduce stress

Sadly though, Malaysians are not sleeping enough. In a research conducted in 2021, a total of 11,356 working adults (≥ 18 years) were recruited from a cross-sectional online health and work survey. Sleep duration was self-reported and was categorised as insufficient sleep (< 7 h) and sufficient sleep (≥ 7 h) based on the National Sleep Guidelines' daily sleep time recommendation for adults. Results showed that average Malaysians only clock in 6.4 hours of sleep per day night! More than half of the participants reported sleep insufficiency. The findings recognise sleep as an emerging public health issue in Malaysia.

Research has shown that those who do not get the required amount of sleep has a tendency to make a poor decision, tendency to be fat, tends to eat more calorie-dense food (chips, cola drinks, chocolates, fries, cakes), and is unable to control urges and desires.

The question is, how does sleeping benefits the body?

When a person sleeps, there are hormones that are released. These natural hormones are highly involved in cleaning up our system. Some of these hormones are:

1. Cortisol – this is a stress hormone that helps us when we are highly stressed. It also helps in reducing inflammation and in maintaining blood sugar level, salt & water balance, blood pressure, and muscle strength. Its peak production is from midnight to early morning.
2. Epithalamin - is another hormone that is thought to increase learning ability and slows down aging.
3. Serotonin and endorphins – are known to be mood elevators. They help prevent depression and keep a person to have a positive outlook.
4. Melatonin – this is the “fix and rejuvenate” hormone. It has a strong component in preventing some major diseases including cancer.

A well-known Author said that “two hours’ good sleep before twelve o’clock is worth more than four hours after twelve o’clock” This statement is correct as science has proven that these hormones are released during pre-midnight sleep! For example, the production of melatonin is dependent upon the night and day rhythm. There is no melatonin during the day, it is only present at night and its peak production is between 12 Midnight to two AM.

There are causes why melatonin cannot reach its peak. For example, when one is stressed, he or she cannot sleep; too much caffeine intake such as coffee, cola drinks, etc – cut down melatonin by 50%; alcohol cuts it down by 40% as well as smoking.

How much sleep is required per night?

Adults :	7-9 hours
Teens:	8.5 hours to 9.5 hours
Newborn:	10.5 hours to 18.5 hours
Less than a year:	14 to 15 hours
1 to 3 years:	12 to 14 hours
3 to 5 years:	11 to 13 hours
5 to 12 years:	9 to 11 hours

It is not just about the number, but about the quality of sleep; sleeping should be uninterrupted throughout the night by getting up and going to the toilet, etc.

Here are common tips about getting a good sleep:

- Get 7-8 hours of sleep each night
- Eat your last meal at least 4 hours before bedtime
- Being in bed by 10:00 and 11:00 p.m. is the most beneficial
- Avoid alcohol, nicotine and coffee
- Go to bed with a peaceful mind

The rule of thumb of having a good night sleep is when you wake up in the morning without an alarm clock, feeling refreshed and ready to face the day.