

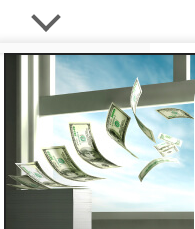
Why Sleep Is So Important For Your Brain

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Henry David Thoreau is quoted as saying, “Happiness is like a butterfly: the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.” I would revise this statement by replacing “happiness” with “sleep” — it seems the more ardently you pursue some shut-eye, the harder it becomes to fall asleep.

More and more Americans are not getting the recommended seven to eight hours of zzz’s a night. Indeed, “About one-third of people living in first world countries are required to wake up two hours before their circadian clocks, or ‘natural waking times,’ tell them to, and 69% of people have to wake up one hour before their bodies would like them to,” according to a [study published in *Current Biology*](#). The evidence shows that this is a problem that can wreak havoc on our bodies and, of course, our brains.



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One animal study published in *The Journal of Neuroscience* demonstrated that, “Prolonged lack of sleep led to 25% of certain brain cells dying,” in mice. In their study, the researchers replicated the type of “sleep loss common in modern life, through night shifts or long hours in the office.” Even more worrisome: these changes appear to be permanent. Dr. Sigrid Veasey, a professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, states that, “We now have evidence that sleep loss can lead to irreversible injury.”

These results were echoed in several studies conducted on humans. One study published in the journal *Sleep* in particular found that “just one night of sleep deprivation was linked with signs of brain tissue loss, measured by blood levels of two brain molecules that usually increase after brain damage.”

Additionally, a separate, longitudinal study published in *Neurology* took MRIs of research participants’ brains over the course of three and a half years. They discovered

the course of the study than those who slept well. The results were even more significant in participants over the age of 60.”

So what do these structural changes potentially mean for our daily cognitive functioning? For starters, it causes significant detriment to your memory processing systems. Studies show that getting enough sleep can help you remember things you learned the day before, particular in a classroom setting.

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Furthermore, one study published in *Psychological Science* found that sleep-deprived participants “were significantly more likely to say they had seen a news video when they in fact never had” and that “38% of them incorporated false information the researchers had given them,” while recounting a personal story.

Lack of sleep is also harmful to our emotional well-being. First and foremost, there is a strong correlation between insomnia and depression. It also can cause us to become more irrational. One study published in *Current Biology* used functioning magnetic resonance imaging to show that “after sleep deprivation, the brain’s emotional centers were more than 60% more reactive.” Anyone who has ever pulled an all-nighter can probably attest to the fact that mood swings are a natural result.





Clearly, getting plenty of sleep is important for a variety of reasons. But remember, it's not just about the quantity (that is, your hours) of sleep, it's also about the quality of your sleep. You should put your screen down at least 30 minutes before you go to bed — otherwise, you may have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, as the blue light can disrupt your body's circadian rhythms.

You may find that practicing mindfulness or meditation before heading to bed can help you. Check out research that shows [how to fall asleep faster](#) or reach out to a medical professional, if you feel that you could be suffering from a sleep disorder, like insomnia.

Making sure that you are using [a comfortable mattress](#) and [bed frame](#) is also really important for a good night's sleep. Lastly, sleeping in total darkness has been shown to improve sleep quality. Try using blackout curtains for the windows in your room to [block out all light that is entering your room from the outside](#). Blackout curtains are

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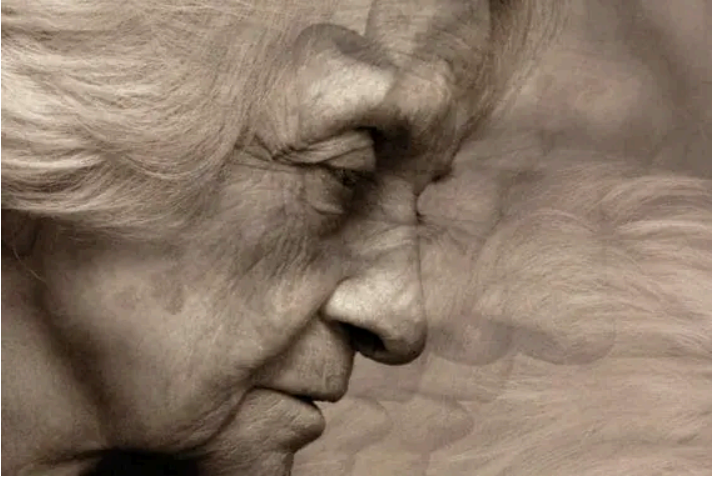
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