

Getting enough sleep for good health matters

A recession is not only tough on the pocketbook – it can also be bad for your health. More and more Americans are lying awake at night worrying about the economy and their personal finances, according to the National Sleep Foundation's annual poll about the nation's sleep habits.

It's estimated that one-third of Americans are losing sleep over the current state of affairs in the country, according to the most recent poll results released in March 2009.

The average adult gets just six hours and 40 minutes of sleep per night, according to the study. An increasing number of Americans (20 percent) report that they get less than six hours of sleep per night. Nearly one-third (27 percent) attribute their lack of good sleep to distress over their personal finances, the economy or employment. And the poll found a significant rise in the number of people – 64 percent – who experience a sleep problem at least a few nights a week. The Institute of Medicine estimates that 50 to 70 million Americans chronically suffer from sleep disorders and sleep problems.

The number of Americans with sleep problems has increased from 13 to 20 percent in just eight years – and this daily fatigue impacts life in many ways, from our physical functioning to our



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of nightly sleep for infantrymen, from four hours per night during deployment to a minimum of seven to eight hours, to sustain "operational readiness."

The National Sleep Foundation confirms that while needs vary, most adults require between seven and nine hours of sleep. Teens and children need even more – from nine to 14 hours each night.

This data confirms what common sense has long told us: the more well-rested we are, the better equipped we are to deal with the challenges that come our way each day, whether the issue at hand is national security or negotiating the hook-up line at school carpool.

Sleep is a time for the body to restore and regulate various internal functions that keep us healthy. This includes muscle and tissue repair, the removal of toxins from the body, hormone production and maintenance of the body's circadian rhythms.

Lack of sleep can cause stress, make us more prone to illness and depression, decrease our energy level, and affect our memory. The long-term effects of insufficient sleep are more than just chronic drowsiness or difficulty in focusing on and performing daily tasks. Sleep deprivation has been linked to an increased risk of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, depression, heart attack and stroke.

Poor sleep has many causes, from lifestyle to medical conditions. A proper

mental alertness and ultimately, our long-term health.

How important is sufficient sleep? Important enough that the U.S.

Army recently revised its recommendations for the amount

diet, regular exercise, and an established sleep routine are simple ways to promote good sleep.

Sleep apnea is a common disorder that affects the quality of our sleep. A person who has sleep apnea stops breathing for 10 seconds or more during sleep – and these episodes can occur as many as 50 times an hour. The two types of sleep apnea include obstructive sleep apnea and central sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea is more common and involves the blocking or narrowing of airways in the nose, mouth or throat – generally due to the relaxation of the throat muscles and tongue during sleep. Central sleep apnea is caused by a malfunction of the central nervous system, and generally seen in people who have suffered a stroke, heart failure or other forms of heart and lung disease.

Symptoms of sleep apnea include loud snoring, feeling sleepy during the day, tossing and turning during the night, insomnia, and awakening with headaches. Sleep apnea can be diagnosed through a simple test ordered by your doctor and is treatable in many ways, from modifications in your diet to the use of a breathing device at night.

Other mild sleeping disorders can be treated through behavioral therapy, medication or alternative therapy. This might include relaxation or breathing exercises, prescription medications, a new exercise routine or meditation. Be aware that medications for a sleeping disorder are generally prescribed by your doctor and are intended for short-term use.

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In February 2009, the new Scenic Mountain Sleep Center began performing sleep studies to assist physicians in diagnosing sleep difficulties right here in Big Spring. If you are experiencing trouble staying awake, falling asleep or staying asleep, ask your doctor if you may benefit from a sleep study or visit www.smmccares.com/sleep today.

