

A better night's sleep is possible

Are you getting enough sleep? Chances are, if you're like most Americans, the answer is a definite "no."

According to the National Sleep Foundation, the amount of sleep Americans get has decreased over the last 10 years. A recent poll shows that the number of people getting less than six hours of sleep has increased from 12 percent in 1998 to 20 percent in 2009.

On the heels of National Sleep Awareness Week March 7-13, sleep specialist Dr. Mohammed Pathan of St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore analyzes the reasons we aren't getting the sleep we need, and offers tips to reclaim those lost hours.

According to Pathan, hectic lifestyles, stress, television, the Internet, Blackberries and other digital technology are among the culprits keeping us awake at night.

"People are able to be active at anytime from anywhere," he said. "People don't realize how important sleep is and what the health consequences are of not getting a good night's sleep on a regular basis. We are giving more importance to activities other than sleep."

Side effects of sleep deprivation can include depression, heart disease, hypertension, weight gain, irritability and slower reaction times. Different age groups need different amounts of sleep, but sleep needs are also individual.

"While you may be at your absolute best sleeping seven hours a night," Pathan said, "someone else may clearly need nine hours to have a productive life."

Most healthy adults need seven-eight hours of sleep every night. Infants need at least 16 hours, while school-aged children should get 10-11 hours.

"There are profound effects of optimum sleep to overall health and well-being," said Pathan. "It keeps our heart healthy, reduces stress, reduces inflammation, boosts memory, helps lose weight, repairs the body and reduces the risk of depression."

According to Pathan, people should follow these tips from the National Sleep

Foundation to promote a good night's sleep:

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