

THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP



When you think of sleep what are your thoughts?

I don't get enough of it, I don't have time, I only manage to get 5 to 6 hours, I am so tired when I wake up, I can't sleep!

Now take a minute to think what your health is like?

I suffer from headaches, I have digestive problems (IBS, heartburn, stomach aches), I have depression or feel very low, I have no energy, I have a serious illness (cancer, heart disease, diabetes)...

Even though you may not be suffering from the above, without knowing it you might actually be ill. Today's perception of good health is so far removed from what it should be that most of us go through life without realising just how ill we actually are!

So what is good health?

Lots of energy, enthusiasm, pain free/no body aches, strong and positive emotional state, clear sense of surroundings, joyous/happy...

These are a few of what good health should represent. If you are one of the lucky few to tick these boxes then congratulations you have passed go and collected 100 points to living longer and experiencing life in harmony.

However as experienced by so many of you and you only have to read the papers, magazines to find evidence that we are living half the quality of life we should be living. From allergies, IBS, to more serious depression/suicide, Cancer/drug treatments, Alzheimer's, Heart Disease and the list goes on and on.

Have you ever stopped to think that sleep and your health might be connected?

We have taken for granted that we need to sleep and what the benefits of it are. It was only back in 1910 when the average night sleep was nine and a half hours. Now days I bet you are lucky to even have a full nights sleep of about 6-7 hours.

So why is sleep important for our health?

Sleep is the process for hormone regulation. Our body has many hormones (chemical messageners), which control our bodily systems (immune, digestive, cardiovascular, brain, sexual, and so on) for example:

*Estrogen Melatonin Insulin Testosterone
Prolactin Cortisol.*

Once you lose sleep your hormones are affected and they don't just spring back into the balance but it causes dysfunction of the body. Chemical processes will be altered for example your appetite, fertility, mental and cardiac state, this will lead to disease.

How do your hormones work?

Lets start with waking up in the morning. It 6.00am Cortisol (stress hormone) starts to rise to prepare you for daily activity, work or even fight (don't forget we were designed to fight for food). Cortisol rises with daylight in the morning or any light stimulus i.e. artificial light indoors. Cortisol levels should start to decrease from midday to low levels in the evening. Insulin should also follow a very similar pattern, which is achieved by reducing your carbohydrate meals in the evenings to limit fat storage of excess food not stored as energy.

With cortisol decreasing in the evening to a low, and Melatonin and Prolactin (causing growth and repair of body and brain chemistry) increasing from 10pm when you should be tucked up in bed. You then sleep soundly till 6am and you wake up feeling refreshed and ready for a new day.