



The beauty of sleep

Did you know that there is a single activity that when performed once a day can improve memory and mood, prevent weight gain, decrease risk of chronic illness and injury, strengthen the immune system, and lead to better judgment?¹ A good night's sleep (seven to eight hours for adults) can provide all of those benefits, and sleep is something you already do every day. The question is, do you get enough quality sleep?

Research indicates the majority of adults do not get the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep per night.² While many view insufficient sleep as a way of life, lack of sleep can negatively impact how you function throughout the day. Not getting enough sleep can lead to³:

- Slower reaction times
- Weight gain, particularly in younger individuals⁴
- Poor concentration
- Weakened immune system
- Negative moods and lack of motivation
- Impaired memory and judgment
- Increased incidence of accidents

Each of these factors can lead to decreased performance, resilience and readiness for Sailors and Marines.

Getting quality sleep

While it may not be possible to get eight hours of rest every night, there are things you can do to increase the amount and quality of your sleep:¹

- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule – try to go to bed and get up at approximately the same time every day.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine, particularly later in the day - effects of caffeine can take up to 8 hours to wear off completely.
- Avoid alcohol immediately before bed – alcohol has been shown to decrease the quality of sleep. It can also cause you to wake up in the middle of the night more frequently.
- Avoid naps after 3 pm – although 10-30 minute naps can be very beneficial, napping later in the day can lead to difficulty falling asleep at night.
- Maintain a good sleep environment – keep your room cool and minimize bright lights and noise if possible.
- Unplug from technology 15-30 minutes before bed – TVs, computers, smart phones and other electronics negatively impact both the ability to fall asleep and the quality of sleep. Engagement in these activities stimulates the brain and the glow from the screen decreases the release of melatonin, the hormone that induces sleep.⁵
- Exercise – just not within 5 hours of bedtime, if possible.



- Do not stay in bed if you cannot fall asleep – if you are not able to fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing until you are sleepy. Try reading with low light, listening to relaxing music, or practicing deep breathing techniques or guided imagery exercises.

Getting quality sleep while deployed or operational

Even a young, healthy service member can experience a 25% decline in mental performance for every 24 hours they go without sleep.¹ Although eight hours of sleep is frequently not possible while deployed or operational, there are things that can be done to improve the quality of sleep that you are able to get.

- Relax before bed – try writing, stretching or practicing yoga, or taking a shower or bath.
- Make your area “sleep friendly” – even if there is no air conditioning or you cannot eliminate lights and sounds, items such as a small fan, ear plugs and a sleep mask can help.
- Take naps – 10-30 minute naps can negate many of the negative effects of insufficient sleep.
- Learn tricks to help you get back to sleep faster if you do wake up – try a relaxation technique, reading with low light, or listening to calming music at a low volume. Avoid watching the clock.
- Talk to your leadership about sleep recovery – 12 hours of sleep recovery time can help a service member recover completely from as many as two to three days of lost sleep.

Where to turn if you need additional help

If you continue to have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, or if you continue to feel tired during the day despite spending enough time in bed at night, consult your healthcare provider. Resources are also available online and by phone:

- Speak with a trained health resource consultant at the DCoE Outreach Center by logging on to the [Real Warriors Live Chat](#) or calling 1-866-966-1020.
- Visit the [Military OneSource](#) webpage or contact a Military OneSource consultant by calling 800-342-9647.
- Access the Sleep Workbook on [afterdeployment.org](#) for 24/7 self-paced support.
- If you are returning from an Individual Augmentee (IA) assignment, consider attending a [Returning Warriors Workshop](#).
- Visit the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center’s [sleep resource page](#).

1. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Healthy sleep. US Department of Health and Human Services. http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/healthy_sleep_atglance.pdf. Published August 2009. Retrieved March 20, 2013.
2. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Your guide to healthy sleep. US Department of Health and Human Services. http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/yg_slp.htm#tipsgetting. Published November 2005. Retrieved March 20, 2013.
3. Real Warriors. Getting enough sleep while deployed. Real Warriors Campaign. <http://www.realwarriors.net/active/deployment/sleep.php>. Last reviewed January 2013. Retrieved March 20, 2013.



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4. Patel, S. & Hu, F. Short sleep duration and weight gain: A systematic review. *Obesity (Silver Spring)*, 2008, 16(3): 643–653.
5. Figueiro, M. Light from self-luminous tablet computers can affect evening melatonin, delaying sleep. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. [http://news.rpi.edu/update.do?artcenterkey=3074&setappvar=page\(1\)](http://news.rpi.edu/update.do?artcenterkey=3074&setappvar=page(1)). Published August 27, 2012. Accessed March 21, 2013.