



The Beauty of Sleep

Did you know that there is a single activity, that when performed once a day for the right amount of time and quality can improve memory and mood, decrease risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, and lead to better job performance? In addition, the hormones produced during sleep can strengthen the immune system, increase muscle growth, and prevent weight gain.¹ Whether you follow a traditional schedule or work overnight shifts and sleep during the day, your good “night's” sleep can provide all of those benefits. It is recommended that adults get at least seven to eight hours of consecutive sleep in a 24 hour period.²

While many view insufficient sleep as a way of life, lack of sleep can negatively impact how you function throughout the day.¹ Not getting enough sleep can lead to:

- Slower reaction times and decision making¹
- Impaired memory³
- Irritability and feelings of depression³
- Weight gain, particularly in younger individuals⁴
- Weakened immune system¹
- Negative moods and lack of motivation¹
- Increase in feelings of sleepiness during the day³

These negative side effects of sleep loss can lead to decreased performance, resilience, and readiness for Sailors and Marines.

Getting quality sleep

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

- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule. Try to go to bed and get up at approximately the same time every day, including the weekends.¹
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine, particularly later in the day. The effects of caffeine can take up to eight hours to wear off completely.¹
- 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.¹



- Avoid naps in the late afternoon or evening, and limit naps to no more than 25 to 30 minutes.⁵ While naps can be very beneficial, napping later in the day can lead to difficulty falling asleep at night.¹
- Maintain a good sleep environment. Keep your room cool and minimize bright lights and noise, if possible. Using a small fan is a great replacement for air conditioning, and items such as ear plugs and a sleep mask help block excess lights and sounds.⁵
- Remove distractions from your room. Televisions, computers, smart phones, and other electronics, can distract you from sleep.¹
- Make exercising a priority, just not within two to three hours of bedtime.¹ People who are continuously active tend to sleep better.⁶
- 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.¹ Try reading with low light, listening to relaxing music, or practicing deep breathing techniques or guided imagery exercises.⁵

Getting quality sleep while deployed or operational

Even young, healthy service members can experience a 25 percent decline in mental performance for every 24 hours they go without sleep.⁵ Although seven to eight hours of sleep is frequently not possible while deployed or operational, use the following tips to get as much sleep as you can and maintain quality sleep:

- House those who work night shifts in the same location to limit disturbances; prevent too much light from entering if possible.⁷
- Deployed service members report getting only six and one-half hours of sleep per day.⁶ If possible, map prior to night or extended duty.⁷
- Maintain regular physical fitness. Staying physically fit is important for mission readiness, psychological wellness, and quality sleep.⁸
- Some service members experience problems sleeping after deployment.⁶ If a nightmare wakes you up, turn on the light to ground yourself, and get out of the bedroom to calm down.⁵

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.⁵

Resources are also available online and by phone:

Visit the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's [sleep resource page](#).



- Speak with a trained health resource consultant at the Defense Center of Excellence Outreach Center by logging on to the [Real Warriors Live Chat](#) or calling 1-866-966-1020.
- Visit the [Military OneSource](#) Web page 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](#).
- Check out [Make the Connection](#) and hear from veterans about how to approach sleep problems during the transition back to civilian life.

References

¹Your Guide to Healthy Sleep. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/sleep/healthysleepfs.pdf>. Published April 2006. Revised September 2011.

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⁴Patel, S & Hu, F. Short sleep duration and weight gain: A systematic review. *Obesity* (Silver Spring). 2008;16(3): 643–653 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1038/oby.2007.118/full>.

⁵How to Develop Healthy Sleep Habits. Real Warriors Campaign. <http://www.realwarriors.net/active/deployment/sleep.php>.

⁶Sleep and Warfighters. Human Performance Resource Center. <http://hprc-online.org/mind-body/sleep-optimization-1/sleep-optimization-strategies/sleep-and-warfighters-1>.

⁷Sleep Questions from the Field. Human Performance Resource Center. <http://hprc-online.org/mind-body/sleep-optimization-1/sleep-optimization-strategies/five-sleep-questions-from-the-field-1>.

⁸Physical Fitness Training Year-Round Boosts Resilience. Real Warriors Campaign. <http://www.realwarriors.net/active/treatment/physicalfitness.php>.