



SLEEP AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: IS THERE A LINK?

The benefits of physical activity are well known. Being active* on a regular basis helps to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol, osteoporosis, and dramatically lowers your risk of heart disease and stroke. Regular physical activity also benefits your mental health, by improving your thinking, learning, judgement skills, and may even lower your risk for mood disorders such as depression. On the other hand, the importance of sleep is often overlooked as many adults function on less than the recommended minimum of seven hours of sleep per night. During sleep, your body repairs cells, fights infection, and builds muscle mass. Quality sleep also helps to improve learning, creativity, problem-solving skills, and your emotional well-being . * (i.e., 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week for adults 18 to 64)

WILL BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE HELP ME SLEEP?

Research has shown that moderate-intensity physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) during waking hours, especially combined with sleep hygiene, helps to improve sleep. Participants in one study who were physically active for at least 150 minutes per week, and were taught sleep hygiene methods, saw an increase of 1.25 hours of sleep per day compared to a group that did not exercise. Another study confirmed this finding, as adults with difficulties sleeping fell asleep quicker, slept longer, and had better sleep quality after they began exercising on a regular basis. Being physically active for at least 150 minutes per week, as recommended by Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines, will not only help to manage weight, reduce chronic disease risk, and improve emotional well-being, but it will also help you to sleep better.

WILL BEING ACTIVE BEFORE BEDTIME AFFECT MY SLEEP?

This question continues to stump researchers who have yet to find a definite answer one way or the other. Some studies suggest that being physically active up to three to four hours before you sleep does not impact your sleep. Another study found that engaging in physical activity 60 minutes or less before you sleep will negatively impact the time it takes to fall asleep. Ultimately, the time of day you decide to be physically active is a personal decision. If the best time for you to be



physically active is before bedtime and it doesn't affect the quality of your sleep, continue to do so. On the other hand, if you find yourself unable to sleep after physical activity, try finding a different time of day to be active. The important thing is that you're getting enough sleep while being sure to fit in the recommended minimum amount of physical activity each day. Statistics Canada reveals that women who are physically active at recommended levels sleep 19 minutes less, on average, than their counterparts who don't exercise. The reason? More women than men tend to get up early in the morning to be physically active. It turns out that this lack of sleep is worth it though, as fewer of the physically active women reported having trouble falling or staying asleep (Statistics Canada, 2015).

WILL THE QUALITY OF MY SLEEP AFFECT MY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

The truth is, the more tired you feel when you want to be active, the less intense and shorter the session will be. One study found that adults who slept for the recommended minimum of seven hours or more were able to exercise for longer and harder the next day. So, not only does physical activity help you sleep better, but it will help you improve the quantity and quality of your physical activity the next day. Both sleep and physical activity are essential for optimal well-being. Ignoring one or the other can impact both your physical and mental health. Research has shown that engaging in moderate-intensity, physical activity on a regular basis helps to improve sleep quality. Studies related to being active before going to sleep have provided mixed results, so stick to the time of day that works best for you.

Key References

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Why is sleep important? (2012). Retrieved February 17, 2016 from [Click here to access the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute](#)

Statistics Canada. Who gets any sleep these days?

Sleep patterns of Canadians. (2014). Retrieved February 17, from [Click here to access the Statistic Canada website](#)