

# Get your ZZZ's

## Skipping sleep can cause problems

BY DILIA NARDUZZI

WE ALL WANT to get a good night's sleep, but that seemingly simple goal proves elusive for many. In 2016, insurance provider Aviva International found that 31 per cent of Canadians feel they are not getting enough sleep. And sleep quality is also an issue; according to Statistics Canada, 35 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men have difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep.

**What is interfering with quality sleep?** Smartphone usage and other screen time is a huge culprit. New research out of the University of California, San Francisco found the more screen time people accumulated during the day, the less sleep they got, and the sleep was of inferior quality. The effects were heightened if people used their phones closer to bedtime.

The blue light from the screen, which reduces the amount of natural melatonin the body produces to help us get to sleep, is only partially to blame; it's also the stimulation, excitement or worry caused by whatever we're interacting with that makes it harder for the brain to settle down, says Dr. Reut Gruber, a clinical child psychologist and sleep expert at McGill University.

Research out of Ohio State University found that people who watched violent media an hour and a half before bedtime were 13 times more likely to have violent dreams. What's more, people who are

sleep-deprived drink more sugary, caffeinated beverages, according to a new study in the journal *Sleep Health*, though researchers have yet to determine if lack of sleep drives sugar consumption or if sugar consumption drives shorter sleep duration.

**How do you get a good night's sleep, then?** Practice sleep hygiene to improve the amount and quality of the sleep you're getting. Prioritize sleep and follow consistent sleep patterns, says Costco member Alanna McGinn, a sleep consultant in Toronto and



### BEDTIMES

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society ([www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)) and the Canadian Sleep Society ([css-scs.ca](http://css-scs.ca)), your sleep needs change depending on your age. Here's a guideline:

- Toddlers: 10 to 13 hours.
- Preschool and school-age kids: 10 to 12 hours.
- Teenagers: 9 to 10 hours.
- Adults (18–25): 7 to 9 hours, though it can range from 6 to 9 hours, depending on the person.
- Older adults: 7 to 8 hours, though even healthy elderly folks can experience less sleep at night and more naps.—DN

founder of Good Night Sleep Site ([goodnightsleepsite.com](http://goodnightsleepsite.com)). “Go to bed at the same time, wake up at the same time, even on weekends,” she advises.

The next step? You guessed it: “Remove tech from the bedroom and give yourself a tech curfew.” This means at least an hour before bed, you and your children should stop looking at all your screens—including the TV. Don't use the excuse that your phone is your alarm clock. “Stores still sell alarm clocks,” says McGinn. It's a matter of changing your habits.

Clearing clutter from the bedroom is also important, says McGinn, as well as doing whatever you can to create a calming environment for sleep. She also suggests bringing back bedtime for adults, which means including activities around bedtime that encourage sleep. Reading books—not an e-reader—is the go-to, but there are other things you can do to relax, like using an adult colouring book, journaling before bed to help empty your mind and practicing mindful meditation.

Be wary of naps too late in the day, says Gruber, as anything after 2 p.m. can interfere with nighttime sleep and set up a cycle of sleep deprivation. How much sleep is ideal? The National Sleep Foundation in the United States has updated guidelines regarding the number of hours needed per age group, says Gruber. (See “Bedtimes” for recommendations on how much sleep people of varying ages need.)

**Why is getting sleep so important?** Consistently having a bad night's sleep “causes physiological changes to our metabolism and increases obesity. It can also contribute to increased risk for cardiovascular disease, and it weakens the immune system,” in the long term, at the same time that it makes us tired, irritable and moody during the day, says Gruber. She adds that for teens, “even when they're well rested, regulating emotions and mood is very challenging,” so when they aren't sleeping well it can make an already challenging “period of turmoil” even worse.

Kids need more sleep than adults, and researchers think there are many reasons for this: Partially it's because they are still growing and developing and therefore need more shut-down time, says Gruber. Sleep hygiene recommendations are mostly the same for kids and adults, even though bedtimes are earlier for kids and teens. In the summer, kids' routines go out the window, says McGinn: “Bedtime gets pushed [back]; naps have been missed.” Back-to-school time is the time to get back to normal in many areas of life, including sleep. **C**

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