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Experts Recommend 7-8 Hours of Sleep Each Day for Better Brain Health

New report gives tips and recommendations on sleep to help maintain and improve brain health.

WASHINGTON, DC—If you want to maintain your brain health as you age, then get the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep per day, according to a new consensus report issued today by the [Global Council on Brain Health](#) (GCBH). The expert recommendations include a wealth of information and practical tips for all adults age 50-plus to improve and maintain healthy sleep habits.

A recent [AARP consumer survey](#) found that 99% of adults age 50-plus believe that sleep is important for their brain health, but over four in 10 (43%) say they don't get enough sleep. More than half (54%) of adults report they wake up too early in the morning and can't get back to sleep.

"We know how many questions adults have about how much sleep is enough, and the role that sleep plays in brain health and cognitive function," said Marilyn Albert, Ph.D., GCBH Chair, Professor of Neurology and Director of the Division of Cognitive Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. "This report answers a lot of these questions and we hope it will be a valuable source of information for people."

The new recommendations cover a wide range of sleep-related issues, including common factors that can disrupt sleep, symptoms of potential sleep disorders, and prescription medications and over-the-counter (OTC) sleep aids. A host of helpful expert tips are also included in the report, such as ways to help fall asleep or stay asleep, when to seek professional help for a possible sleep disorder, and the pros and cons of napping.

Consensus Statements

Based on the scientific evidence, the GCBH made the following consensus statements:

- Sleep is vital to brain health, including cognitive function, and sleeping on average 7-8 hours each day is related to better brain and physical health in older people.
- The sleep-wake cycle is influenced by many different factors. A regular sleep-wake schedule is related to better sleep and better brain health. Regular exposure to light and physical activity supports good sleep.
- People, at any age, can change their behavior to improve their sleep.
- Persistent, excessive daytime sleepiness is not a normal part of aging.
- Sleep disorders become more common with age, but can often be successfully treated.
- People with chronic inadequate sleep are at higher risk for and experience more severe health problems, including dementia, depression, heart disease, obesity and cancer.

Practical Tips and Advice

The following are just a sample of tips included in this report:

- Get up at the same time every day, seven days a week.
- Restrict fluids and food three hours before going to bed to help avoid disrupting your sleep to use the bathroom.
- Avoid using OTC medications for sleep because they can have negative side-effects, including disrupted sleep quality and impaired cognitive functioning.
- Dietary supplements such as melatonin may have benefits for some people, but scientific evidence on their effectiveness is inconclusive. Be particularly cautious of melatonin use with dementia patients.
- Avoid long naps; if you must nap, limit to 30 minutes in the early afternoon.

"Although sleep problems are a huge issue with older adults, it's unfortunate the importance of sleep is often not taken seriously by health care professionals," said Sarah Lock, AARP Senior Vice President for Policy, and GCBH Executive Director. "It's normal for sleep to change as we age, but poor quality sleep is not normal. Our experts share the steps people can take to help maintain their brain health through better sleep habits," said Lock.

The GCBH, founded in 2015, is an independent international group of scientists, health professionals, scholars and policy experts working on brain health issues. Convened by AARP with support from [Age UK](#), the goal of the GCBH is to review the current scientific evidence and provide recommendations for people so that they can maintain and improve their brain health.

The full GCBH recommendations can be found here: www.globalcouncilonbrainhealth.org

The 2016 AARP Sleep and Brain Health Survey can be found here: www.aarp.org/sleepandbrainhealth

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About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also works for individuals in the marketplace by sparking new solutions and allowing carefully chosen, high-quality products and services to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the world's largest circulation publications, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

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