

Lighting the Way to Better Sleep and Health

Few of us would say we routinely get enough sleep. Typical sleep duration has reportedly declined over the past half-century or so, probably due to the myriad changes in work and lifestyle that have emerged with our increased reliance on electronic technology. This is problematic, as sleep is critical to so many of our cognitive functions and health. Sleep facilitates memory consolidation, emotional regulation, decision-making and judgment and maintains normal levels of alertness and focus throughout the day. In addition to its effects on cognitive functions, sleep is important for many aspects of physical health and brain repair. During sleep, the brain rids itself of neurotoxins increases the number of brain repairing oligodendrocytes and replenishes depleted energy reserves. Without adequate sleep, people are prone to a host of health related problems, including inflammation, weight gain, and high blood pressure. But while it is easy to point out the problems associated with disrupted or curtailed sleep, it is much less clear how to intervene to improve people's sleep-wake cycles. Can anything be done to get us back on track?