

# We Desperately Need Sleep!

The demands urban living and work stress have changed our attitudes towards sleep and rest – they have become a luxury few think they can afford. Add to that the digital screens keeping us up at all hours of the day. It's time we realise why sleep is crucial and how it affects almost every aspect of our lives.

## THE PRICE OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Sleep deprivation is so common, especially in the Asia-Pacific region that most people shrug it off. Some might even be proud of their ability to function on little sleep. AIA Group Limited conducted a research from May to July 2019 involving 5,000 respondents in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand and found that over half of the people surveyed (55 per cent) said they get just six hours of sleep every night. To help combat sleep deprivation, AIA launched a new initiative called #OneMoreHour with the aim of raising awareness of the health benefits of getting adequate sleep and introducing rewards to encourage people to get more sleep.

There are far too many experts postulating how much sleep we should be getting, but there's never an exact answer to that. A laboratory study involving 60 students who observed two different sleep routines revealed that the group with fewer hours of sleep was less vigilant. In attendance at the #OneMoreHour launch event was Professor Michael Chee, one of Asia's leading sleep experts from Duke-NUS Medical School and NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in Singapore, who shared key insights about the dangers of sleep deficit. "In Asia-Pacific, it's common for us to spend billions on quick fixes like supplements, but the



## HER STORY

### Health Smart

real fix is to put effort into getting better sleep," said Professor Chee. In his opinion, as much as we know the benefits of sleep, we give it a low priority and this can be seen from the rising prevalence of obesity and diabetes, as insufficient sleep is one of the contributing factors to these diseases.

Professor Chee further explained on how getting less sleep is detrimental not only to one's physical health, but also to brain health. Sufficient sleep improves our immune system, thus reducing the likelihood of developing chronic diseases and helps in cutting back stress and anxiety. The expert advocates sleeping just #OneMoreHour because he reckons that change needs to be done step by step. "It's impossible to change your lifestyle immediately hence we encourage people to do it gradually. Sleeping is to de-stress, let's not make it a mission to accomplish," he said.

## SLEEP QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

### 1 CAN WE MAKE UP SLEEP DEFICIT WITH CAT NAPS?

Power naps do work wonders for our cognition and also to improve our mood. "Nap is like a booster, but that doesn't give us the green light not to have enough nocturnal sleep. Adequate nocturnal sleep is very important, especially to our metabolism and body mass index (BMI)," explained Dr Chee.

### 2 WHAT IS THE IDEAL NUMBER OF SLEEP HOURS?

The recommended hours vary depending on different age groups. As we know, children need more sleep, whereas for teenagers, the ideal would be eight to ten hours. For adults, it's seven to nine while the older group can pass with six hours of sleep.

### 3 WILL SLEEPING MORE ON THE WEEKEND ALLOW US TO CATCH UP ON SLEEP?

"Catching up is better than not catching up, but the fact that you have to play catch-up suggests that you are really deficient in sleep. It's also what we call the 'social jet lag,'" said Professor Chee.

'Social jet lag' is a shift in sleep schedule where people sleep in on the weekend and wake up later. Professor Chee pointed out that although shifting your sleeping schedule is better than being sleep-deprived, it will, however, take a hefty toll on your health.

### 4 CAN ONE HAVE TOO MUCH SLEEP?

Too much sleep is defined as greater than nine hours a day. While insufficient sleep is damaging, on the other end of the spectrum, too much sleep on a regular basis can put our health at risk too. "Oversleeping leads to health hazards like negative cognitive, higher risk of diabetes and stroke, thereby leading to a higher risk of mortality," explains Professor Chee.



## GET REWARDED FOR SLEEPING

In September last year, AIA Group Limited unveiled an additional programme to the AIA Vitality app. Designed to help combat sleep deprivation, users are able to earn points when they maintain a healthy lifestyle via activities like doing AIA online health assessments, going for health check-ups, eating right, exercising and getting enough sleep. The points collected will indicate their AIA Vitality status and they will then be rewarded with benefits from partners like AirAsia, BP Healthcare, Fitness First, Guardian, Jaya Grocer, TGV Cinemas and more. The members will also get to enjoy extra insurance benefits or cash bonus on selected insurance and takaful plans with AIA.

## HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP

### Tip 1: Sleep earlier

It can be tempting to watch one more episode of your favourite TV series or get your never-ending work done so you can go to bed without worries. Even when most working adults have greater discretion over their time use, most don't exercise their choice wisely and often choose to 'fully utilise' the night with activities and work, pushing back their bedtime.

### Tip 2: Manage your internet interaction time

It's that bottomless pit you would find yourself stepping into every night before bedtime. A study conducted in Germany found that the availability of broadband internet services was associated with 25 minutes less nocturnal sleep than in regions where there was no access. So turn off your phone before you head to slumberland tonight, and you will wake up a fresh leaf the next morning.

### Tip 3: Have a wind-down routine

An overactive mental state should be curtailed when you are falling asleep. If you are one of those who have difficulty disengaging yourself from the concerns of the day before bedtime, you might want to relax with music, read a book or even take a stroll to wind down and go to bed with a calm mind.

### Tip 4: Strive to focus on the task at hand

Stop procrastinating and get all your work done before bedtime. You will have more time to enjoy some leisure and sufficient sleep. Without quality sleep, one will feel fatigued and less productive, which results in staying up late to work and the cycle will never break.

### Tip 5: Value your sleep and listen to your body

Stop bookmarking 'sleep hacks' as there are no shortcuts to making significant lifestyle changes. If you are always sleepy, you don't need your fourth or fifth cup of coffee. It simply means you are in a sleep deficit, so you need to do something with your sleeping pattern and start getting #OneMoreHour of sleep. 🌙

— Source: Professor Michael Chee on AIA Sleep Content Hub