



ESTHER BUSH

Sleep

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on sleep across the lifespan and its effect on our overall health. Erricka Hager, health advocate at the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.

EH: Good morning, Ms. Bush. It has been a few weeks since our last health page. It's nice to talk with you again, especially when we get an opportunity to chat about a topic that is meaningful to all of us, no matter who we are.

EB: Yes, Erricka; it's great that you say that. Sleep is a topic that normally isn't talked about as much in the African American community, especially as it relates so vitally to our health. We can all benefit from a better knowledge of the impact of sleep and how it affects us at various stages of our lives.

EH: I absolutely agree, Ms. Bush. Did you know that studies consistently find that Black Americans sleep more poorly than White Americans? Roughly half of Black Americans don't get enough sleep, and poor sleep contributes to a vicious cycle of poor health outcomes. Factors like living in neighborhoods with higher crime rates or having to work multiple jobs can contribute to Black Americans not getting enough sleep. Black Americans are suffering from a "sleep gap" due to unequal access to safe and comfortable sleep environments.

EB: Wow! Thank you, Erricka, for all this new information. I also saw Dr. Buysse noting in the overview that African Americans are disproportionately represented in night-shift work, which contributes to an increase in poor sleep outcomes.

EH: That's right, Ms. Bush. Poor sleep outcomes in night-shift workers are being linked to an increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease—both of which continue to disproportionately affect Black Americans. Dr. Buysse is currently recruiting retired night-shift workers for a study to help pinpoint how a lack of sleep contributes to poor health outcomes like obesity or diabetes.

EB: Yes, Erricka. The study being conducted by Dr. Buysse and his team will be clearly beneficial to the communities we serve. I hope that African American readers of this column will consider participating. What would be your advice to folks reading this article, both night-shift workers and otherwise?

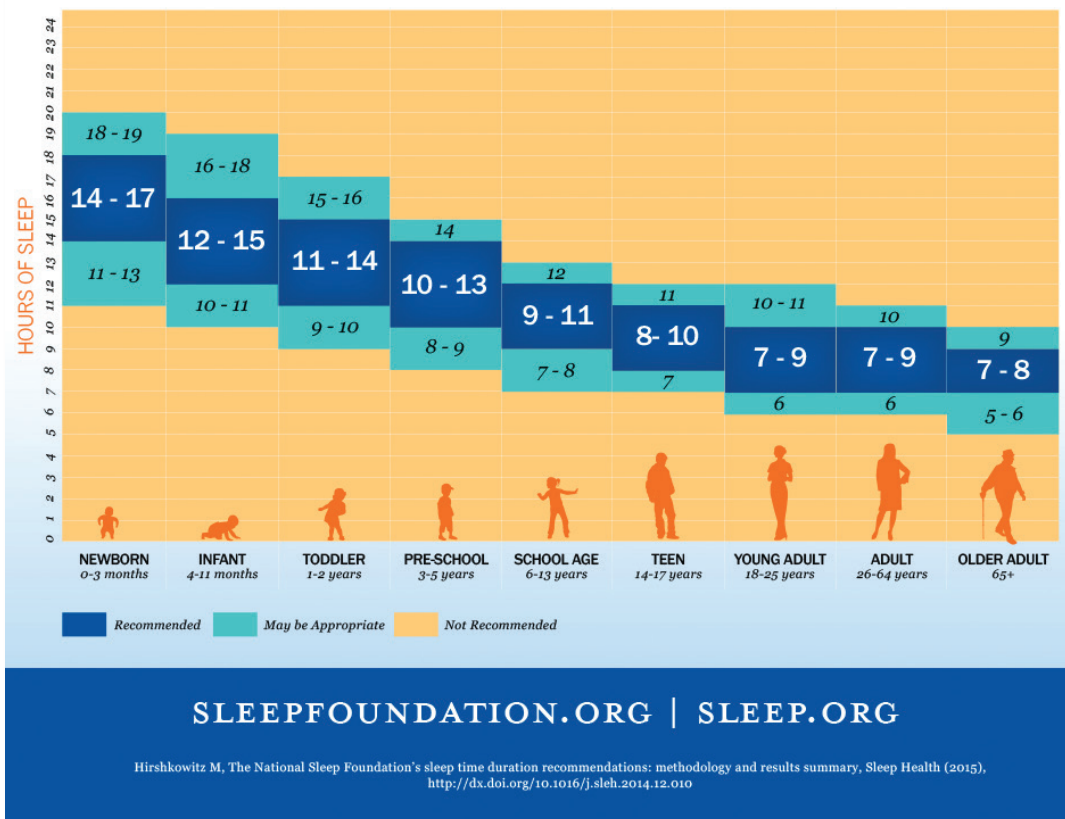
EH: Foremost, it's important to recognize that an ample amount of sleep is essential to the overall well-being and health of a community. But also, our readers should know that there are research studies being done at the University of Pittsburgh about sleep and its effect on our health. Getting involved with research studies is one of the best ways for us to help to improve health outcomes for future generations of Black Americans.

EB: Thank you for having this chat with me, Erricka. We've provided all readers with some great information and ways they can take charge of their health today. I look forward to chatting with you next month as we discuss depression and its relationship to mental health.

Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION

SLEEP DURATION RECOMMENDATIONS



Sleep Across the Lifespan

Want to start taking care of your health? Begin by looking at your sleep habits. Research shows that not getting enough sleep can not only make people feel irritable and tired, it can negatively affect health.

"Humans spend roughly one-third of their lives sleeping, so we know it's important, biologically speaking," says Daniel J. Buysse, MD, UPMC Professor of Sleep Medicine and professor of psychiatry and of clinical and translational science at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Sleep is important to people of all ages. Though babies and children may look peaceful when they (finally) go to sleep, their brains and bodies are working. Sleep is essential for brain development, helps protect the heart, helps keep children from being overweight and boosts the immune system. A consistent sleep routine can also help children become better sleepers. It can also help regulate circadian rhythms, the 24-hour sleep-wake cycle often referred to as a "biological clock."

Adolescents' sleep patterns change, which Dr. Buysse says has a biological basis as well as a social one. Teens' biological clock shifts later, which explains their desire to stay up late and sleep later in the mornings. Dr. Buysse points to some school districts pushing their start times later because "simply changing school start times by about an hour in the morning can reduce absenteeism, improve standardized test score performance, reduce traffic accidents and maybe even improve mental health."

Dr. Buysse reminds parents that one of the most important things they can do for



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their children is model good sleep behavior. Parents can make it a part of their daily routine to get regular, appropriate amounts of sleep.

Adults' sleep needs also shift, but sleep is still important to maintaining health. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, sleep allows the brain to prepare for the next day. Sleep deficiency is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, depression, suicide and risk-taking behavior. A brain functioning with a sleep deficiency has more trouble making decisions, solving problems and has slower reaction times.

"The art of good sleep involves the amount, regularity and time of sleep," says Dr. Buysse. "We need to get the right

amount of sleep, at the right time of day and on a regular basis. Not allowing our bedtime and wake time to vary too much can be a key to getting good sleep. Research shows that the right time is at night. For adults, the middle of our sleep should be 3-3:30 a.m. because that's when our biological clock is best suited to sleep."

What if people cannot sleep in the middle of the night because they are working? Dr. Buysse is currently running a study to see how night-shift work affects people's health, even after they have retired. He says that about 15-20 percent of the United States' population works something other than day shift—and research shows that African Americans, in particular, are disproportionately represented in night-shift work.

"This study is important because there's increasing evidence that working the night shift may increase a person's risk for certain diseases," says Dr. Buysse. "When people work the night shift, their bodies have a hard time regulating their biological clock with the external world. This creates problems with metabolism and cardiovascular function."

Although you might think that people who work consistent night shifts also shift their biological clock to be on an opposite schedule, Dr. Buysse says that's not the case. Night-shift workers are still exposed to some sunlight and to regular social activities. This keeps their clocks on a day schedule, which, in turn, affects their sleep quality. His study with retired night-shift workers may lead to identifying an under-recognized risk for heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Dr. Buysse reminds us that we should "pay attention to how our bodies prioritize, seek and regulate sleep. It's a cornerstone of a set of behaviors we can use to be as healthy as we can be."

The Importance of Sleep for Teenagers

Sleep touches nearly every aspect of our lives. Sleep plays an important role in many areas of teenagers' lives, including academic performance, athletic performance and physical health. Sleep is also critical to mood and irritability, as well as the risk for developing mental health problems. Some people who do not get enough sleep have even been rated as less attractive. Even though sleep is highly important to all of these areas of our lives, most teenagers do not get enough sleep.

It is recommended that teens sleep eight to 10 hours every night to function at their best. But most teens get seven hours or fewer. Sometimes this is the result of normal biological changes to sleep that occur during adolescence, which contribute to teens wanting to go to bed later at night and wake up later in the morning. On school days, this may mean that they get fewer hours of sleep than is recommended.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine are testing a program that aims to help teenagers get

more sleep. You may be eligible to participate in this research if you are 13-15 years old and you do not have serious health conditions. All participants will watch a two-minute video about sleep. Those who do not get enough sleep will be invited to participate in our sleep program, which includes completing questionnaires, meeting with a clinician to discuss sleep and using a smartphone to answer questions about sleep. If you are interested, please contact **Brandy Núñez at 412-246-5693** or **Dr. Jessica Levenson at 412-647-7937**. You may also e-mail tapas@upmc.edu. Eligible participants will be compensated for their time.



ARE YOU RETIRED AND HEALTHY?

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh are conducting a study to learn more about how sleep, health, and functioning are affected by a history of night shift work. We are currently looking for volunteers to assist in our study.

Participation will include completing questionnaires, interviews, and measures of cardiovascular health. Some participants will be asked to complete a laboratory sleep study.

Participants can earn compensation up to \$450 for their time and will also receive a sleep and heart health "report card".

You may be eligible to participate if you...

...are at least 60 years of age
...are currently retired
... have a history of working day or night shift

Interested in learning more?
Please call 412-246-5015 or
email sir@upmc.edu

