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Regular exercise, healthier food, quitting habits, being positive—maybe one or all of these are in your list of New Year's resolutions. That is awesome, but instead of creating good habits and quashing the bad, why not improve on your current ones, like sleep? And not just sleeping longer: This means improving the habit of sleeping smart and sleeping better.

They say a human being spends a third of his life sleeping. Sleep is that important as it is needed for the body to be able to perform at its best during the waking hours. Unfortunately, with the fast-paced world a lot of people are keeping up with, it is becoming evident that more and more individuals are not getting enough sleep, and they think that is okay. It is not. According to the World Sleep Society, a non-profit organization representing sleep researchers and clinicians with volunteers from around the world, sleep problems are now a global epidemic that affects as high as 45 percent of the world's population. And if that is not alarming enough, the World Sleep Society also says that most of these sleep disorders are preventable and treatable and yet, less than a third only seek professional help. Sleep is very important as it affects:

Brain function

Sleeping helps the body in absorbing new learnings, forming new memories, connecting feelings, activities, and events. It also helps in making one stay alert and improve concentration.

Mood

Lack of sleep can make one more emotional. According to *Psychology Today*, there is a rise in activity in the amygdala part of the brain (responsible for emotional reactions) when one is sleep deprived,



SKINVESTING
DR. KAYCEE REYES

GOING FROM A TO ZZZ

Why sleep matters

and there is also a disconnect between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex area of the brain that is supposed to suppress these reactions. Moreover, lack of sleep also increases negative thinking that may lead to anxiety later on.

Metabolism and weight

Sleep affects the hormones ghrelin (the "I'm hungry" signal) and leptin (the "I'm full" signal). Lack of sleep increases ghrelin and decreases leptin, leading one to overeat. Moreover, metabolism is slower when one doesn't get a good shut-eye. This combination ultimately leads one to pack on the pounds.

Physical health

According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, sleep deprivation is linked to a rise in the risk of heart problems, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, and obesity. Lack of sleep is also linked to elevated blood sugar levels and a weaker immune system.

So what makes a good night's sleep, well, good? A good night's sleep is influenced by a lot of factors. What makes one awake and fall asleep is due to one's sleep/wake cycle, also called the circadian rhythm. Chemicals and hormones in the body control this cycle,

such as adenosine (that adds up as one is awake longer) and melatonin (that goes up the afternoon and at night, then goes down in the early morning hours). Caffeine blocks adenosine, which is why one drinks a cup of coffee to stay awake while lights may affect melatonin production, and this is why too much screen time may keep one up at night. Other chemicals involved in sleeping are GABA neurotransmitters that turn off wakefulness and nitric oxide that helps

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release adenosine. On the other hand, what keeps one up are norepinephrine, epinephrine, and cortisol that makes one awake, attentive, and alert. The circadian rhythm is regarded as a vital aspect of good health now than ever before as three American scientists **Jeffrey Hall**, **Michael Rosbash**, and **Michael Young** have been granted the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discovering the underlying

mechanisms that affect it. Certain factors such as age, stress, work schedule, jet lag, or mental illness such as depression affect the body's circadian rhythm. If the circadian rhythm is interrupted and not corrected, it may lead to disease later on, from heart problems to certain cancers.

While most adults get adequate sleep at eight hours, some may get it at seven, and a few, at six. Sleeping patterns change as one gets older.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) recommends:

- Infants to get 12 to 16 hours of sleep
- Children from one to two years to get 11 to 14 hours of sleep
- Children from three to five years to get 10 to 13 hours of sleep
- Children from six to 12 to get nine to 12 hours of sleep
- Teens from 13 to 18 years to get eight to 10 hours of sleep
- Adults from 18 onward to get seven to eight hours of sleep

While it is important to make sleeping quantity a goal, it is also as important to focus on sleep quality, or how much restful sleep you are getting every night. Sleep.org

says that this means falling asleep within 30 minutes after lying down, and only waking up once at most during the night and falling asleep quickly right after (in 20 minutes or less). To help one sleep, these techniques may also naturally induce sleep:

- Having a sleeping schedule
- Limit naps in the early afternoon, and not longer than 20 minutes
- Turning off electronic devices an hour before bed
- Avoiding midnight snacking
- Avoid nicotine and caffeine, especially at night
- Use relaxation methods such as lighting up an aromatherapy candle, meditating, or taking a hot shower
- Spend time outdoors during the day
- For shift workers:
 - Keep lights on during working hours
 - Limit or avoid caffeine intake in the last few hours of the shift
 - Turn off the lights in daytime sleep
 - Use relaxation methods in daytime sleep

Stress from deadlines, tests and examinations, meetings, reports, and even personal problems can really cause one to lose sleep or have bad sleep quality. In order to sleep better, you must make sleeping a priority at night. If sleep troubles continue, such as waking up tired, waking up often in the middle of the night, snoring, sleeping too little or too long, having trouble falling asleep or staying awake during working hours, and so on, it is best to talk to your doctor to be examined for sleep disorders. The World Sleep Society says that sound sleep is one of the three essential markers of good health together with a balanced diet and regular physical exercise. So starting tonight, make sleeping a healthy habit too. Sweet dreams!

