

USC Center for Work & Family Life

What is Sleep Debt

Everyone needs a certain amount of sleep each night. For most people, this is usually around 7-8 hours a night.

When you sleep less than the optimal amount that you need, you accumulate a "sleep debt." (eg. if you need 7 hours each night, and you only got 5 hours, you now have a debt of 2 hours! If you keep getting insufficient sleep, your debt grows). However, recent research has found that you may be able to make up this debt up to around two weeks after accumulating it. After this time, your body cannot keep an accurate account of how much sleep you're missing.

(Keep in mind that no research has found that you can build up a surplus of sleep, so don't attempt to "store" hours for upcoming all-nighters)

Sleep debt is dangerous, resulting in impaired memory, concentration, and motor skills. Symptoms have even proven comparable to having blood alcohol content of up to 0.1%, making it risky to drive or operate machinery.

Can sleep deprivation be cured?

To combat sleep deprivation, there have been many advisements from varying organizations. Sleeping in for several days in a row may help one feel better rested. If nightly sleep cannot be extended, short 15 to 20 minute naps during the day may lead to heightened alertness. Other ways to mitigate fatigue include regular physical activity, bright light, caffeine, or prescription analeptics. However, to cure sleep deprivation, sleep habits must be permanently restructured. An individual must make lifestyle changes to obtain adequate and good-quality sleep.

How much do I need?

Newborns	(0-2 months)	12-18 hours
Infants	(3-11 months)	14-15 hours
Toddlers	(1-3 years)	12-14 hours
Preschooler	(3-5 years)	11-13 hours
School-Age Children	(5-10 years)	10-11 hours
Teens	(10-17years)	8.5-9.5 hours
Adults	(17+)	7-9 hours

For more information feel free to call CWFL at (213) 821-0800 or visit www.usc.edu/worklife