

# The Effects of Sleep Deprivation



Sleep deprivation can have serious effects on your health in the form of physical and mental impairments. Inadequate rest impairs our ability to think, handle stress, maintain a healthy immune system and moderate our emotions. In fact, sleep is so important to our overall health that total sleep deprivation has been proven to be fatal: lab rats denied the chance to rest die within two to three weeks.

Maintaining good health in today's society often depends upon just how well your health insurance coverage applies to your lifestyle and needs. A little effort can save you a lot of money...[compare the offers of several health insurance programs](#) and choose the one that's best for you.

Without adequate rest, the brain's ability to function quickly deteriorates. The brain works harder to counteract sleep deprivation effects, but operates less effectively: concentration levels drop, and memory becomes impaired.

Similarly, the brain's ability to problem solve is greatly impaired. Decision-making abilities are compromised, and the brain falls into rigid thought patterns that make it difficult to generate new problem-solving ideas. Insufficient rest can also cause people to have hallucinations. Other typical effects of sleep deprivation include:

- depression
- heart disease
- hypertension
- irritability
- slower reaction times
- slurred speech
- tremors.

In this section, we will outline and examine the various effects of sleep deprivation. Our articles will describe how prolonged lack of sleep affects both mental and physical health.

## Sleep & Aging

The older we get, the more likely it is that we will suffer from some kind of sleep disorder. In fact, over 50 percent of people over 64 years old suffer from some type of sleep disorder. While the hormonal and physical changes that occur as we age will likely affect sleep, especially in menopausal women, the increased presence of other medical conditions and disorders is also a factor that tends to upset the sleep of the elderly.

One of the biggest sleeping problems the elderly experience is the inability to get deep, restorative sleep. Although they tend to sleep just as much as they did when they were younger, the elderly don't get as quality sleep, meaning that they often suffer from fatigue and daytime drowsiness. The main reason for this is that older people don't get as much REM sleep, the deepest, most restorative sleep phase. Keep reading to learn more about the relationship between [sleep and aging](#).

## Weight Changes

Dramatic weight changes, especially weight gain, are also common effects of sleep deprivation. Because the amount and quality of the sleep we get affects our hormone levels, namely our levels of leptin and ghrelin, many physiological processes that depend on these hormone levels to function properly, including appetite, are affected by our sleep.

Leptin is a hormone that affects our feelings of fullness and satisfaction after a meal, and ghrelin is the hormone that stimulates our appetites. When you suffer from sleep deprivation, your body's levels of leptin fall and ghrelin levels increase. This means that you end up feeling hungrier without really feeling satisfied by what you eat, causing you to eat more and, consequently, gain weight. Keep reading to learn more about how [sleep affects your weight](#).

## Resources

Bouchez, C. (2007). *The dream diet: Losing weight while you sleep*. Retrieved July 5, 2007 from the WebMD Web site: <http://www.webmd.com/solutions/sc/link-sleep-weight-loss/sleep-to-get-thin>.

E-Medicine Health Staff. (2007). *Sleep disorders and aging*. Retrieved July 5, 2007 from the EMedicine Web site: [http://www.emedicinehealth.com/sleep\\_disorders\\_and\\_aging/article\\_em.htm](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/sleep_disorders_and_aging/article_em.htm).