

[IMAGE]

# Starving for Sleep: 5 Reasons You're Not Getting Enough Sleep This Winter

By Editorial Staff

If you don't think quality sleep and health are connected, think again. A growing body of research links poor sleep to much more than increased stress, fatigue, irritability and difficulty concentrating; think depression, weight gain, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, among other life-threatening consequences. Here are some of the ways this time of year negatively impacts our sleep patterns, reducing our opportunity to enjoy restful, restorative, health-promoting sleep:

1. *Light Shortage*: Shorter days and inclement weather can limit sunlit hours during the winter months. Between the lack of vitamin D production and potential depressive symptoms inadequate sunlight exposure may cause, sleep may not be easy this time of year. What's more, low / no light can make you lethargic throughout the day, elevating the risk that you'll be unable to fall asleep (or stay asleep) during the night.
2. *Poor Timing*: Winter brings with it two different variables that can mess with our sleep: more non-work days (holidays) and less opportunity to go outdoors (in general). That combination means you could end up staying up later than usual and/or sleeping in more, disrupting your sleep patterns and leading to poor sleep. The body needs consistent sleep (total hours and time falling asleep / waking up); sleeping 14 hours one day and 2 the next is worse than sleeping 8 hours each day.
3. sleep - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Stuff Syndrome: You can't sleep well if your body is working overtime. In this case, it's the body working to digest the thousands of calories you've consumed throughout the day at your latest holiday feast. Plus, overindulging in fatty, high-calorie foods can cause stomach upset, making you toss and turn instead of sleeping through the night. That's one reason experts suggest we eat our final meal / snack of the day at least 2-3 hours prior to bedtime.
4. *Viral Overload*: Cold and flu season brings with it a host of unpleasant symptoms you could come down with at a moment's notice: sneezing, coughing, sore throat, runny / stuffy nose, fever, and various aches and pains. Sound like a recipe for a poor night's sleep? You betcha. If you can't put down the tissue box for more than a minute at a time, your likelihood of getting a full night's sleep

goes right out the door.

5. *Mind Games*: Stress is a major reason for poor sleep throughout the year, but during the winter months, stress can multiply. Whether it's the added pressure of spending time with relatives, getting all the holiday shopping done, meeting crunched deadlines at work, or something else, stress can weigh you down. That added weight translates into too much thinking, which can cause you to spend half the night worrying instead of sleeping. Add in the increased risk of winter seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and you might not be in the right mood to enjoy restorative, adequate sleep.

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