

[IMAGE]

## Deep Sleep Matters

By Editorial Staff

As you sleep, your body cycles through two stages: REM (rapid eye movement) and non-REM sleep. A complete sleep cycle takes anywhere from 1.5 to 2 hours and then repeats, but with longer REM vs. non-REM sleep as the night progresses. The REM stage is often characterized by vivid dreams; the non-REM stage is called *deep sleep*.

It's harder to wake up from deep sleep; after all, you're sleeping *deeply*. And the more you can achieve deep sleep – and thus be less prone to wake up – the more likely you are to begin your day feeling refreshed. More uninterrupted sleep also means you get the full benefits of adequate sleep – and avoid the short- and long-term health complications associated with poor / inadequate sleep.

For older adults, deep sleep is important for a key reason, according to research: it may help protect against memory loss in seniors at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. University of California, Berkeley researchers have discovered that while disrupted sleep is associated with faster accumulation of a particular protein in the brain (beta-amyloid) linked to Alzheimer's-related memory loss, deep, "slow-wave" sleep may help mitigate this accumulation.

Among healthy older adults free of dementia / Alzheimer's, those who experienced higher levels of deep sleep during the study period (conducted at a sleep lab) performed better on a memory task compared to those who experienced less deep sleep – even though both groups had high levels of beta-amyloid deposits, as determined by positron emission tomography (PET) scans. In other words, deep sleep appeared to "protect" seniors from the harmful effects of the beta-amyloid deposits. Findings appear in *BMC Medicine*.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of cognitive decline, and memory loss is one of the most common – and as you might imagine, frustrating – symptoms as the disease progresses. If deep sleep can play a preventive role, what's stopping you from improving your sleep habits, starting *tonight*, to help enjoy the maximum amount of deep sleep possible?

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