

## Answers

- 1. FALSE.** Your body rests during sleep, but your brain doesn't. An active brain during sleep prepares you for alertness and peak functioning the next day.
- 2. FALSE.** You can "get by" on less sleep, but you cannot train your body to need less sleep. Sleep is a biological need that is genetically determined. Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep to function at their best.
- 3. FALSE.** When people are active, they usually don't feel sleepy. When they take a break from activity, or feel bored, they may notice that they are sleepy. However, what causes sleepiness most is sleep loss: not getting the sleep you need. Adults who don't get enough good sleep feel sleepy when they're bored. Boredom, like a warm or dark room, doesn't cause sleepiness, it merely unmasks it.
- 4. FALSE.** Sleep is as necessary to health as food and water, and rest is no substitute for sleep. As noted above, sleep is an active process needed for health and alertness. When you don't get the sleep you need, your body builds up a sleep debt. Sooner or later, this debt must be paid...with sleep. If you drive when you're sleepy, you place yourself and others at risk because drowsy drivers can fall asleep at the wheel with little or no warning. Sleepiness contributes to driver inattention, which is related to one million crashes each year!
- 5. FALSE.** Snoring may indicate the presence of a life-threatening sleep disorder called sleep apnea. People with sleep apnea snore loudly and arouse repeatedly during the night, gasping for breath. These repeated awakenings lead to severe daytime sleepiness, which raises the risk for accidents and heart problems. Yet 95% of those with sleep apnea remain unaware that they have a serious disorder. The good news: With treatment, patients can improve their sleep and alertness, and reduce their risk for accidents and health problems. Physicians and sleep specialists should be consulted.
- 6. TRUE.** Though many people fail to remember their dreams, dreaming does occur for every person, every night. Dreams are most vivid during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep.
- 7. FALSE.** Sleep need remains unchanged throughout adulthood. Older people may wake more frequently through the night and may sleep less, but their sleep need is no less than during young adulthood. When older people sleep less at night, they tend to sleep more during the day. Sleep difficulties are not a normal part of aging, although they are all too common. If poor sleep habits, pain or health conditions make sleeping difficult, a physician can help.
- 8. TRUE.** Most people don't know when they're sleepy. Researchers have asked thousands of people over the years if they're sleepy, only to be told no... just before the individuals fell asleep! What does this mean? Many people don't know if they are sleepy, when they are sleepy, or why they are sleepy.
- 9. FALSE.** If you're having trouble staying awake while driving, the only short-term solution is to quickly change drivers or pull over at a safe place. If you must resume driving, take a short nap or have a caffeinated drink. Doing both – for example, drinking coffee, then napping before the caffeine kicks in – may be even better. Don't resume driving until you are sure you are fully awake and alert. The best solution to drowsy driving is prevention... starting out well rested after a good night's sleep and only driving when your brain has become accustomed to being awake. Research shows that loud radios, like chewing gum and open windows, fail to keep sleepy drivers alert.
- 10. FALSE.** Stress is the number one reason people report insomnia (difficulty falling or staying asleep). However, stress accounts for only a fraction of the people who suffer either chronic insomnia or difficulty staying alert during the day. Sleep disorders have a variety of causes. Sleep apnea, for example, is caused by an obstruction of the airway during sleep. Narcolepsy, which is characterized by severe daytime sleepiness and sudden sleep attacks, appears to be genetic. No one knows yet what causes restless legs syndrome, in which creepy, crawly feelings arise in the legs and are relieved, momentarily, by motion.
- 11. TRUE.** All living things (people, animals, even plants) have a circadian or about 24-hour rhythm. This affects when we feel sleepy and alert. Light and dark cycles set these circadian rhythms. When you travel across time zones, your circadian rhythm adjusts when the light and dark cycle changes. For shift workers, the light and dark cycle doesn't change. Therefore, a shift worker's circadian rhythm never adjusts. Whether you work the night shift or not, you are most likely to feel sleepy between midnight and six a.m. And no matter how many years one works a night shift, sleeping during the day remains difficult. Shift workers should avoid caffeine during the last half of their workdays, block out noise and light at bedtime, and stay away from alcohol and alerting activities before going to sleep.
- 12. FALSE.** Unfortunately, many people who suffer from sleep disorders don't realize that they have a disorder or that it can be treated. But sleep disorders don't disappear without treatment. Treatment may be behavioral (for example, going to sleep and waking at the same time every day, scheduling naps or losing weight), pharmacological (involving medication), surgical or a combination. Untreated sleep disorders may have serious negative effects, worsening quality of life, school and work performance, and relationships. Worse, untreated sleep disorders may lead to accidents and death.

**For more information about sleep issues,  
visit the National Sleep Foundation's  
Web site at [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)**



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Rev. June 07 - #112