

9 June 2008

By: Monica Gaza, Life & Style Editor



Lack of sleep can be very harmful for our bodies, both long-term and in the short run onemagazineonline

Don't Mess with Sleep

In these hectic times, we should all avoid voluntary sleep deprivation at all costs

Whenever we happen to have one of those hectic, incredibly busy days when time seems to be slipping by and we feel like we're not getting anything done properly, sleep is one of the first things that we readily sacrifice. An hour or two, we say to ourselves, will not make a great deal of difference in our daily schedule, as long as at the end of the day (or rather, in the middle of the night) we can finally put aside our computers and give a well-earned, sleepy sigh of relief. However, doctors have been warning us for a long time that self-induced sleep deprivation is very bad news for us, as it reduces our productivity and exposes us to wide varieties of risks. "The group of people getting optimal sleep is getting smaller and smaller. When a person's sleep drops to six hours or less, that's when a lot of things become very problematic", warns an expert from the Henry Ford Hospital Sleep Disorders and Research Center in Detroit. Of course, not all of us need the same amount of sleep - however, six hours per night is definitely not enough for anyone. The immediate effects of lack of sleep affect our day-to-day activities and our overall productivity, but don't let yourselves be fooled into a false sense of security - lack of sleep also has long-term effects that build up gradually and sleeping late on a Sunday will definitely not act like a compensating mechanism. The short-term effects of sleep deprivation range from making bad decisions to much more serious things, such as lapses of attention while driving, which can cause veritable tragedies. The long-term effects of our "stay awake longer" crusade are equally severe: weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems, depression and substance abuse can all occur as we stubbornly refuse to allow our brains to rest completely. When we sleep, all sorts of beneficial changes take place in our bodies - and when that doesn't happen, things stop functioning properly. One example of this would be the fact that due to insufficient sleep, our bodies secrete smaller amounts of appetite-suppressing hormones and higher doses of appetite stimulating hormones, which make us crave more food than our bodies really need and thus pile on the pounds. With all the other sources of stress in our environment, lack of sleep is definitely not something we should inflict upon ourselves.