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STRESS AND SLEEP

APA and SCPA Offer Tips for Better Sleep

Columbia, SC March 31, 2014 — In today's overscheduled society, sleep may feel like a luxury, when in fact, it's a necessity. Sleep is vital to our health, safety and overall well-being.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends that adults get 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Insufficient sleep has been linked to car crashes, poor work performance and problems with mood and relationships. Sleeping difficulties are also often connected to underlying problems such as stress, depression or anxiety and can raise the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, obesity and stroke.

According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2013 *Stress in America*TM survey only 20 percent of Americans say the quality of their sleep is very good or excellent. In addition, adults who sleep fewer than eight hours per night report higher stress levels than those who sleep at least eight hours per night.

"With the start of spring, this is a perfect time for you to adopt a new behavior to help you sleep better," Dr. Jeannine Monnier, South Carolina Psychological Association (SCPA) President said. "Even changing one small thing, like cutting out snacks before bed, can really make a difference."

APA and SCPA offer these tips for better sleep:

Create a relaxing sleep environment. Keep your bedroom dark, cool and as quiet as possible and keep electronics such as a computer, TV and phones out of the bedroom. Exposure to stimulating objects and lights from computer and TV screens can affect levels of melatonin, a hormone that regulates your body's internal clock.

Schedule down time before bed. Setting aside time to unwind and quiet your mind will help you get into a sleepy state of mind. Meditating, breathing exercises, taking a bath and listening to relaxing music are great ways to calm down at night.

Maintain a regular exercise routine. Research shows that exercise increases total sleep time, particularly the slow-wave sleep that's important for body repair and maintenance. However, don't exercise too late in the day. Working out close to bedtime can boost energy levels and body temperature, making it harder to fall asleep.

Avoid late night meals and alcohol consumption. Skip heavy meals before bed, and limit alcohol. Even if a cocktail seems to help you fall asleep, it can interfere with sleep quality and disrupt sleep later in the night.

Seek support. Licensed psychologists have the professional training and skills to treat individuals suffering from depression and anxiety, which have been linked to sleep problems like insomnia. Psychologists can help people identify and change their behaviors and manage the thoughts, feelings and emotions that can interfere with a healthy night's sleep.

To learn more about sleep and mind/body health, visit www.apa.org/helpcenter and follow @APAHelpCenter on Twitter. To find out more about the South Carolina Psychological Association, visit www.scpsychology.com and follow us on Twitter at @SCPsychological.

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South Carolina Psychological Association is the only professional organization in South Carolina representing all areas of psychology: academic, practitioner, public service, and students. As a 501 (c)(6) professional association that represents the professionals of psychology in South Carolina, South Carolina Psychological Association has the purpose to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare; to foster and maintain high standards of practice, teaching, and research in the field of psychology; and to make available to the public information regarding psychology as a science and as a profession.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 134,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.