

We have all heard that getting a good night's sleep is important to our overall health. However, now more than ever, we are ignoring that advice.

A leading sleep scientist [has recently claimed](#) that our lack of sleep as a society is shortening lives and is affecting every aspect of our biology.

Dr. Kaninika Verma, Director of Sleep Medicine for OSF HealthCare, agrees. She says she has noticed a stigma being attached to adequate sleep, and that getting enough sleep is often associated with laziness.

However, sleep deprivation is a major health concern. A person who is sleep deprived can't make proper judgments, has a slow reaction time and has difficulty processing information or learning.

Dr. Verma says functioning on a few hours of sleep cannot be realistically maintained, and is in fact dangerous.

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Dr. Kaninika Verma, Director of Sleep Medicine, OSF HealthCare

"More and more studies are coming out where if you don't sleep properly you don't function properly. If you're not getting an adequate amount of sleep, you are functioning as somebody who is intoxicated. As a drunk."

Adults should be getting seven to eight hours of sleep at night. Kids have different requirements. Babies should sleep 18 to 20 hours, toddlers up to 12 hours, and school aged kids need anywhere from 9 ½ to 10 ½ hours of sleep. Teenagers and young adults should shoot for 8 ½ to 9 hours of sleep.

While the recommendations are important, Dr. Verma maintains that both quantity and *quality* of sleep are required to feel refreshed. However, shutting down your brain to get adequate shut-eye isn't easy for many. It can be tough to unwind when our mind has different ideas.

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Dr. Kaninika Verma, Director of Sleep Medicine, OSF HealthCare

"We bring the whole world into our bedroom with our mind. Our mind is boundless. It teaches itself to not shut down when it's supposed to. So we think about what could, should, would, can and will and how it will happen, and it gets us reeling and reeling, and so the brain learns that it's okay for me to stay awake. It's okay for me to think. It's okay for me to stay awake when I am supposed to shut down."

Dr. Verma recommends setting a regular bedtime schedule and sticking to it. Recognize when your body is tired, and most importantly, get screen time out of the bedroom. Television, iPads, laptops and phones should be turned off about an hour before bed, so you can focus on winding down.

*****SOT*****

Dr. Kaninika Verma, Director of Sleep Medicine, OSF HealthCare

"That blue light – that blue screen light – actually it gets rid of our own natural sleep hormone. It actually suppresses it, so it makes it more difficult to fall asleep, so we definitely need to get all of that screen time out of the bedroom.

But if all else fails, Dr. Verma says it might be time to speak with a sleep specialist.

OSF HealthCare has created a sleep school of sorts. In partnership with a clinical psychologist, physicians use a technique called cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia. It's a therapeutic way to train your brain to shut down at the end of the day. It couples therapy sessions and work at home by the patient. It isn't a quick process, but Dr. Verma says it is the most effective treatment for insomnia. She says patients need to make getting significant sleep a major goal for healthy living.

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Dr. Kaninika Verma, Director of Sleep Medicine, OSF HealthCare

"Just say I need to focus on this. Make it a priority. Make sleep a priority."

OSF HealthCare Sleep Medicine provides comprehensive care for sleep disorders of all types in patients of all ages. For more information, [click here](#), or call (309) 672-5682.