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Sleep Well Every Night

Everyone tosses and turns for different reasons. Here's how to make sure the whole clan gets the sleep they need to stay happy and healthy ■ BY CAMILLE NOE PAGÁN AND SAKINA YUSUF KHAN



YOUR HUSBAND IS on his third cup of coffee—and it's not yet 8 am. Your teen is so bleary-eyed and grumpy that you want to run in the other direction. And you're so tired you can barely remember your nick name. If your family is sleep deprived, you're not alone. There are many like yours that don't get enough eyes shut. Sleep experts say that only 1 out of 3 people in fast-paced metros get enough sleep all month long. Studies show that 16% of adults get less than 6 hours per night. "That's well short of the 7 to 8 hours needed to ward off obesity, high blood pressure, and other ills," says Dr Manvir Bhatia, chairperson, department of sleep medicine, at Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

To complicate matters, each family member deals with unique sleep sappers, says Dr Vikram Sarabhai, a sleep disorder expert at Delhi's Max Hospital. But fret not. These simple

“ GETTING AT LEAST 7 HOURS OF SLEEP EVERY NIGHT CAN STAVE OFF PROBLEMS LIKE OBESITY AND HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

STOCKBYTE

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strategies will help your family sleep longer and better every night.

Your Kids

SLEEP THIEF: Late-night gadget time. Artificial light from computer and television screens tells the brain that it's not time to wind down. "Your body thinks artificial light is daylight—which prevents the release of melatonin, a sleep-inducing chemical," says Sarabhai. A study from Wayne State University found that talking on a cell phone before snoozing caused a 13% drop in deep sleep—the type that helps people recover from daily wear and tear. To get your kids to log off:

- **Set a technology curfew** Shut off the TV and have your children stop using phones and computers at least an hour before bed, advises Bhatia.

- **Use low lighting** Turn down the lights in your kids' rooms a half-hour before bedtime to allow melatonin to kick in, say sleep experts. Or try switching the bulbs in their rooms to 40 watts or less.

- **Do morning prep at night** "Teens, whose biological clocks tend to be on a later sleep cycle, often struggle with early start times at school," says Bhatia. Solution: encourage your kids to shower and get clothes and homework ready in the evening, and choose fast breakfasts (like cereal) so they can sleep in as much as possible.

You

SLEEP THIEF: Stress. Anxiety and other frazzled states cause your body to release adrenaline, a brain chemical that triggers alertness, says Dr Sanjay Sobti,

critical care and sleep physician at Delhi's Apollo Hospital. Adds Bhatia: "Stress seems to keep more women awake than men—which explains why a majority of my patients are female." To ease your mind:

- **Shower an hour before bed** The warm water is relaxing. Plus, your body temperature will dip afterward, mimicking the physiological changes that naturally occur before sleep.

- **Write away worries** During the day, scribble down your concerns and how you plan to handle them, advises sleep specialist Joyce Walsleben, PhD, associate professor of medicine at New York University. For example, if you're panicked about bills, you might write that you'll go through them and come up with a payment schedule for those you can't tackle right away. Then, if you start to ruminate before lights-out, tell yourself firmly: 'I've already dealt with this. It's time to go to sleep'.

- **Make exercise a habit** Getting your heart rate up for 20 minutes every day—by walking, gardening, or cleaning the house—can lower anxiety and stress levels by as much as 40%, according to a study of about 20,000 adults at University College in London.

Your Husband

SLEEP THIEF: Snoring. By age 50, half of men snore, says Michael Thorpy, MD, director of the Sleep-Wake Disorders Centre at Montefiore Medical Centre in New York City. "The noise can actually wake him up," he says—or prevent him from getting into deeper, more restorative sleep stages. To stop the noise:

- **Measure his neck** "A big neck

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increases the odds that breathing during sleep will be interrupted,” says Charles Bae, MD, a neurologist and sleep specialist with the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. One reason: if his neck is big, it may indicate excess weight—which puts pressure on the airways and can lead to snoring.

■ **Skip wine with dinner** If he likes to wind down with a drink, make sure his last cocktail is at least 3 hours before bed. Alcohol relaxes the throat, which makes snoring worse, says Thorpy.

■ **Get help** If he has tried everything and still feels exhausted during the day, or is falling asleep during work (or while driving!), have your husband checked for sleep apnea, a condition in which breathing is blocked for seconds at a time. The disorder prevents the body from getting enough oxygen during sleep and raises the risk of heart attacks and strokes. Your husband is also more likely to have high blood pressure and erectile dysfunction if he has sleep apnea.

■ **Don't banish him to the couch** It's tempting, but even if he has severe snoring or apnea, try to nod off next to him. (Use earplugs to muffle the din.) A man is more likely to stick with sleep treatment if his wife shares his bed, finds a study from Rush University.

Your Parents

SLEEP THIEF: Changing circadian rhythms. As people get older, hormonal and brain changes cause a shift in the body's internal clock, so they might find themselves sleepy very early in the evening. “This starts a vicious cycle. If your parents go to bed at 8, they may rise at 3 or 4 in the morning. Then they take long naps. So when bedtime rolls around, they're not tired enough to doze off, which deprives them of deep sleep,” says Bhatia. To help your parents snooze on schedule, she suggests that they:

■ **Skip catnaps** Your parents should try to get their required hours of sleep at one time—or, if they must take a nap, have them set an alarm so they sleep no more than 20 to 30 minutes.

■ **Stick to light fare** Recent animal studies suggest that a high-fat diet can disrupt circadian rhythms. Though further research is needed, “greasy, heavy dinners and desserts may disrupt digestion, so you toss and turn,” says Bhatia.

■ **Turn up the light** Unlike teens, seniors may benefit from bright light exposure in the evening—it keeps them from falling asleep too early, explain sleep experts. Look for high-watt bulbs, which mimic natural daylight. ■

IMAGE SOURCE