SLEEP, PT. 1:
What You Need to Know

Video Link

Transcript

As emergency responders, it’s hard to get a good night’s sleep. Lengthy deployments, rotating schedules, and upsetting emergencies make it tough to sleep more than a few hours at a time. So, we feel tired and foggy, even when working.

Research says we need 7 to 9 hours of daily sleep to function well. Too little or too much can lead to serious health problems like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It also changes brain chemistry, causing depression, anxiety, or confused thinking. These health effects can be cumulative and permanent, even with adequate sleep later. Just like smoking and lack of exercise, this is serious stuff.

It’s never too late to tackle sleep problems. The CDC recommends we do the following:

• Be consistent. Go to bed and get up at the same times each day, including on the weekends, unless you must make up for recent sleep deprivation.
• Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, relaxing, and comfortable at 68 to 70 degrees.
• Remove electronic devices from the bedroom like TVs, computers, and phones.
• End screen time at least one hour before bedtime.
• Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
• Get some exercise. Being physically active helps you fall asleep more easily.
• Talk to a professional about intrusive thoughts, nightmares, or mood swings.

Give these techniques a chance to work for 2 to 3 weeks. If there’s no improvement, see your physician for a check-up and an honest discussion. Don’t ignore this issue. It probably won’t go away on its own.

One more thing: sleeping well requires discipline. There is no easy fix. Using alcohol, Benadryl, or other sleep aids is not a good plan. Trust me, I know. To be ready for anything, we need good habits to build brain and body health. That’s the best way to stay resilient. Sleep is one of the most sensitive indicators of how well we’re doing. Take your sleep hygiene seriously.

Contact my friends at the Headington Institute for more information or assistance. They’re here to help.