What's the Deal with Sleep?

By Lydia Lukidis

You go to bed at night, close your eyes, and drift off to sleep. Have you ever wondered how exactly sleep works? Plus, where do dreams come from?

Let’s start with the basics. When you fall asleep, you go through the four stages of the sleep cycle. We’ll explore what happens during each of these stages.

First up is Stage 1. This is when you feel...
A complete sleep cycle lasts between 90 and 110 minutes. Stages 1 and 2 are considered light sleep, while Stage 3 is deep sleep. You’ll go through about four or five of these cycles each night, depending on how long you sleep.

Now, what’s the deal with dreams? The scientific study of dreams is called oneirology. Nobody knows exactly why we dream. It is believed that dreaming helps us process emotions. Things that happen during the day often enter our dreams. We spend about 2 hours a night dreaming. Every single one of us dreams. Some of us dream in color, while others dream in black and white. Although we can dream during each stage of sleep, the most vivid dreams occur during REM sleep.

Sleep is very important. In fact, you spend about a third of your time doing it! That’s a good thing. Quality sleep is as important as food and water. Without it, we wouldn’t be able to function properly. We wouldn’t be able to learn or create new memories. It would also be harder to concentrate and respond quickly. School-age children and teenagers need about 9 ½ hours of sleep each night. Most adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night.

Another funny habit we have is that we often forget our dreams. So the next time you fall asleep, keep a notebook and pen beside your bed. If you have any memories of your dreams when you wake up, write them down right away. Some might make funny stories!

About the Author

Lydia Lukidis is a children’s author with a multi-disciplinary background that spans the fields of literature, science, and theater. So far, she has over 40 books and eBooks published, as well as a dozen educational books. Her latest STEM books include A Real Live Pet! and The Space Rock Mystery.
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1. Write the label 1, 2, 3, or REM next to the correct description of Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, and REM in the sleep cycle.

   _____ Your brain activity slows down, and you aren't woken up as easily. Your body temperature and heart rate fall.
   _____ Your eyes move quickly beneath your eyelids. You may have vivid dreams. Your brain waves are more active.
   _____ You begin to feel drowsy. Your muscles relax. You can still be woken up easily.
   _____ You enter deep sleep, and it's more difficult for you to be woken up. Some people may sleep walk or sleep talk.

2. Nobody knows exactly why we dream. According to the article, what is one reason scientists think we dream?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

3. Which of the following is not true about dreams?
   a. Some of us dream in color, while others dream in black and white.
   b. The average person spends about two hours per night dreaming.
   c. Dreams only occur during the REM stage of the sleep cycle.
   d. The most vivid dreams occur during REM sleep.

4. Based on the information in the article, identify three benefits of getting enough sleep.
___________________________________________________________________________________
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___________________________________________________________________________________
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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

_____ 1. drowsy  a. producing realistic or clear images in your mind
_____ 2. heart rate  b. the worth, value, or excellence of something
_____ 3. rapid  c. sleepy; tired
_____ 4. vivid  d. a routine pattern of behavior
_____ 7. quality  g. the number of times your heart beats per minute
_____ 8. concentrate  h. the scientific study of dreams
_____ 9. habit  i. happening at a quick pace
_____ 10. cycle  j. feelings

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In the article, “What's the Deal with Sleep?” you learned that sleep is important to our ability to function and feel our best. Everything becomes more difficult when we don't get enough sleep. In fact, according to the article, school-age children and teenagers need about nine-and-a-half hours of sleep every night.

On the lines below, answer the following questions:
Do you think you get enough sleep every night? Why or why not?
How do you feel when you don't sleep enough?
What changes could you make to help yourself get enough sleep?

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1. Write the label 1, 2, 3, or REM next to the correct description of Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, and REM in the sleep cycle.

   - 2 Your brain activity slows down, and you aren’t woken up as easily. Your body temperature and heart rate fall.
   - REM Your eyes move quickly beneath your eyelids. You may have vivid dreams. Your brain waves are more active.

2. Nobody knows exactly why we dream. According to the article, what is one reason scientists think we dream?

   Scientists think we dream as a way of processing our emotions and things that happen during the day.

3. Which of the following is not true about dreams?

   - c. Dreams only occur during the REM stage of the sleep cycle.

4. Based on the information in the article, identify three benefits of getting enough sleep.

   Acceptable answers include: sleep helps you to function properly; sleep helps you to learn; sleep helps you to create new memories; sleep helps you concentrate; and sleep helps you respond quickly.
Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

- **drowsy**
  - **producing realistic or clear images in your mind**
- **heart rate**
  - **the worth, value, or excellence of something**

**Preview**

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