



## TBH Focus

Body | *Live With Your Brain in Mind*

- Simple choices we make about how we live can affect our brain health, both in the short-term and in years to come.
- How much sleep we get, the medications we take, and other routine decisions can have a significant impact on daily memory.
- Other aspects of daily life—how we take care of our health overall, manage chronic conditions, or protect ourselves from head injury—can be important factors in future brain health.

## The TBH Science

Whoever coined the term “beauty sleep” only got it partly right: While a good night’s sleep can certainly help us *look* sharp, it’s even more critical to helping us *stay* sharp. When we short-change ourselves of adequate shut-eye (*at least* seven to eight hours per night for most people), our brain power plummets: We’re too frazzled to focus or think quickly, so we aren’t able to take in new information, much less remember it, because it’s while we sleep that what we’ve learned during the day is “saved” in our memory banks. Skimpy sleep may also contribute to that “tip of the tongue” frustration we experience when we can’t seem to retrieve a previously learned fact or name. What’s more, sleep deprivation is dangerous: Driving while weary is more likely to contribute to a car accident than driving while drunk, for example.

Sleep issues can be especially problematic with age. Folks who suffer from sleep apnea, a disorder in which the brain is sometimes starved of oxygen for brief periods, may be at an increased risk for stroke and dementia. And as we get older, our sleep is more likely to be interrupted by the need to make bathroom runs. Certain medications commonly prescribed later in life can also affect sleep, as can mood disorders such as depression. The good news here is that ongoing research is finding that for people who suffer from both depression and insomnia, treating the insomnia with a simple, straightforward variation of cognitive behavior therapy can help to relieve the depression.

How can folks who run up a sleep debt get back in the black? While over-the-counter medication usually *will* help, sleeping pills have unwelcome side effects, increasing the risk for memory problems and confusion. Fortunately, most people can improve their sleep with simple lifestyle changes, such as sticking to a regular bedtime routine, reserving the bedroom for sleep only, practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or aromatherapy, and steering clear of alcohol and caffeine close to bedtime.

## You Will Need

- The “Sleep, Sleep, Sleep” Worksheets (see Resources)
- Essential lavender oil (see Resources)
- Cotton pads or cotton balls



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about the brain-health improving benefits of playing games and participating in other intellectually engaging activities.
  - Use the “Sleep, Sleep, Sleep” worksheets (see Resources) to discuss strategies for improving sleep and how to get a good night’s sleep.
  - Teach each of the “Easy Relaxation Techniques for Getting a Good Night’s Sleep” (see Resources) one at a time; after trying each technique, invite folks to talk about how they experienced it.
  - Have each class member fill out the “Sleep, Sleep, Sleep Better” contract. If time allows, have the class discuss what they have committed to do to get a better night’s sleep.
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- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about the brain-health improving benefits of playing games and participating in other intellectually engaging activities.
  - Review “Tips For Getting a Good Night’s Sleep” worksheet.
  - Teach as many of the “Easy Relaxation Techniques” worksheets as time allows.
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Too little shut-eye can make it tough for us to focus, think quickly, and remember new information, increase our risk of depression, and even cause us to be more accident-prone. If you have trouble sleeping, make sure you have a sleep-friendly environment. You can also try a deep-breathing technique, or you can follow your nose to the Land of Nod by dabbing a few drops of essential lavender oil on your wrists.

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## Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links, and additional materials for this activity.