



SLEEP SUPPORTS IMMUNITY

Submitted by: Dr. Dale Johnson

A compelling influx of scientific data shows how sleep acts as a natural drug (like exercise) to recalibrate our body, reorganize our mind and memory, and refresh our cells and tissues down to the molecular level. Sleep restores our body at every level from the brain down to the cells in our toes, so it's no surprise that the relationship between sleep and worsening COVID outcomes is coming into clearer focus. (1)

Prolonged sleep deprivation has been found to decrease immune function, promote inflammation, raise levels of cortisol (a key stress hormone), and increase risk of chronic disease. We are learning that the number of circulating, policing immune cells actually peak at night, which says a lot about the defensive power of sleep.

Sleeping well helps balance the hormones that regulate our biology and immune state; it also affects how well we feel and cope with daily stressors, how fast our metabolism runs, how robustly our brain operates and thinks, and even how our microbiome functions. (The microbiome is the link that connects your interactions with your environment and potential infectious agents to your immune system.)

While it's hard to imagine our sleep having an impact on gut bacteria, new science shows a connection: **A healthy microbial gut community helps us sleep and sleep better, and a good night's sleep nurtures diverse sanguine colonies of cheerfulness, confidence, and optimism.**

Whereas, sleep supports immunity, stress sinks immunity. Stress is a part of life, and it can even be healthy and motivating in many ways. It is the toxic versions that we need to minimize because the effects range from nuisances like headaches and bellyaches to problems in mental health like crippling anxiety and depression. **Toxic stress is the kind that's unrelenting, prolonged, and so psychologically troubling that it begins to affect our mood, biology and ability to cope.** When the stress hormones start pumping with no end in sight, lots of things can reshape the body, including the power of its immune system.

It is no surprise that all measurements – objective and anecdotal – **have shown a rise in mental health challenges since the pandemic began.** The emotional toll on people has varied, with some people discovering strengths and others discovering the limits of their coping skills.

The good news is that research has revealed that **the majority of people** who survive acutely stressful periods like wars, natural disasters, and catastrophes **recover without long-term psychological issues.**

(1) Sanjay Gupta, *“WORLD WAR C, Lessons from the COVID – 19 PANDEMIC and How to Prepare for the Next One”* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), pp. 212-213