◀◀ exhale

Benefits of sleep

Given the conditions described above, it is not surprising that the benefits of a good seven to eight hours of sleep are many. As Dr Deepak Chaturvedi of the Diabetes, Thyroid and Hormone Clinic in Mumbai puts it, "A normal sleep is essential for the facilitation of motor functions, consolidation of learning and memory, and restoration of strength and energy. In our current, fast-paced life, a sound sleep brings relaxation to the mind and body."

In fact, every organ in our body is affected by sleep, or lack thereof, says Dr Manvir Bhatia of the Neurology and Sleep Centre in Delhi. "Sleep affects the cardiovascular system, from our heart rate to blood pressure. It affects

our metabolism and governs our hormones. It also affects the neuro-transmitters in our brains, which are chemicals that control our moods and behaviour. And it is well-known that it can affect how we look, by making our skin glow or look sallow, depending on how much sleep we have got," he says.

A multitude of factors affect the quality of sleep. Some are external, such as light and temperature, besides chemical substances like nicotine and caffeine and medicines like beta blockers and antidepressants. A number of physical and mental factors also affect the quality of sleep. Two of the most important factors are stress and weight. "A lot of people have what is called the 'racing brain', which means

Be smart about napping

For long, it was believed that napping adversely affects the quality of night-time sleep. Now, doctors believe that napping is not so bad after all. You just need to remember to nap for the right duration. "About 15 to 20 minutes of napping will leave you refreshed, but anything over that will see you go into deep sleep and then when you wake up you will be groggy," says Dr Manvir.

that their minds are constantly active. They can't bring themselves to relax, and this creates a stressful situation. The person is then unable to sleep and this worsens the problem."