

# While You Tried to Sleep

**W**hile you were sleeping, something called the National Sleep Foundation released a poll about Americans' sleep habits and problems. Actually, it released the poll around naptime, but the statistics concern what most of us try to do at night: Sleep. Shockingly, the nonprofit foundation, which is underwritten by the sleep products industry, drug companies and others with a financial stake in helping Americans sleep, found that Americans need more sleep. And it strongly suggested getting more help.

Here's something to wake you up: Sleepiness has an uncalculated effect on American work productivity and safety, on relationships and even on highways. Six in 10 adults reported driving drowsy in the last year; sitting still on L.A. freeways will do that to you.

Even without their first cup of coffee, Americans know that regular sleep is a good thing and that more would be better. That explains the invention of Saturday mornings. Sleep is a wonderful word; said slowly, it suggests what it is: a biologically necessary time of peaceful physical and mental restoration that is also one of the few blissfully free moments when American adults aren't supposed to be doing something.

Once, back when Puritan forefathers were drafting plans to inflict guilt on countless future generations, the sunset signaled an acceptable end to a day's productive activities,

when people might as well go to sleep unless they owned a candle factory. Sleep problems started with electricity, accelerated with TV and worsened with this Internet thing. Even as late as the 1950s, TV had the good sense to play the national anthem at midnight and go silent so everyone had an excuse to sleep. Who knew we should stay awake for the Tokyo markets?

Now there are 500 channels, all the time. Unless you're checking 24/7 or watching what TiVo harvested, you might miss something. Same for the Internet. Who sleeps with any conceivable question un-Googleed? Americans are addicted to multi-tasking; some might think cruise control was designed to permit napping on the interstate.

News now is 24/7. Pharmacies, home TV shopping, online browsing, all 24/7. Even grocery shopping is round-the-clock. If you missed one episode of the "Lassie" show in the 1950s, it's available too at any hour. Who could possibly think of sleeping when there's so much to do, even answering a sleep poll? If you're fading, there's always a nearby Starbucks or other caffeinatorium.

People used to say one-third of life is spent asleep. Americans have cut that closer to a quarter now. According to the poll, 75% of Americans say they have some kind of sleep problem. Truth is, sleep isn't the problem. That's the cure. It's all we're now driven to do while awake that's the problem.

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