

Sleeping well now protects your brain in the future, study finds

SELF

Published January 30, 2015

You know sleep's important. Everyone knows sleep is important. And yet, life gets in the way and suddenly you find yourself sleep deprived, bleary eyed, caffeine dependent, and promising that you'll catch up on shut-eye this weekend (like, for real this time).

But according to a new study, getting quality sleep—and that means daily, not occasional spurts of dozing off until noon on lazy Sundays—can improve your life right now and in the distant future.

After poring over more than 50 years of sleep research, scientists at Baylor University saw an undeniable link between deep sleep and cognition, particularly when it comes to one's memory. They also discovered that older people wake up more throughout the night and, thus, have fewer stretches of deep sleep, which affects circadian rhythm and, as a result, can harm how well one's brain functions.

But there's more: They also found that getting plenty of sleep in your young-adult and middle-age years—so, now—can actually boost mental health and lessen the chance of disease down the road. The research suggests that improving sleep immediately makes a big difference in mental functioning 30 years later. As the lead author of the study explained, "It's the difference between investing up front rather than trying to compensate later." The whole "I'll sleep when I'm dead!" cliché sounds awfully ironic right about now.

Making more time for sleep is essential, and what better time to start than tomorrow morning? Go ahead and sleep in tomorrow—it'll be good for you. Science says so.