



# BEAUTY SLEEP IS NOT A MYTH

by Nancy DeVault

**W**e spend about one-third of our day sleeping. It's vital to dedicate this much time to slumber because along with good nutrition and regular exercise, adequate sleep is one of three healthy lifestyle essentials, says Raj Dasgupta, M.D., spokesperson for the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Adults should aim for seven quality hours of sleep per night to achieve physical and mental rejuvenation. Yet, according to data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 35 percent of local residents in Ocala, Gainesville and the surrounding area report sleeping less than this, which can lead to serious consequences.

Lack of sleep increases risk of aging, cancer, depression, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and obesity, and impedes mental functions such as decision-making, concentration and ability to drive. "One of the main purposes of sleep is the maintenance and restoration of body health; specific functions include waste removal, cell and tissue repair (skin), consolidation of memory, reinforcement of the immune system, resolution of emotions and optimizing metabolism, to name a few," explains Juan A. Albino, M.D., board certified in sleep medicine and medical director of the Village Sleep Lab.

As it turns out, the term "beauty sleep" is legitimate. "A study at the Cleveland Clinic showed poor sleepers have greater number of skin changes associated with wrinkles, as well as a poor ability to repair skin damage from sunlight, one of the main causes of wrinkles, and environmental factors," Albino says. Aside from duration of slumber, our sleep positions have a direct correlation to wrinkles too, according to some experts; similar to the way sleep positions impact breathing patterns, neck/back alignment, circulation and other health factors. Debra Jaliman, M.D., a dermatologist and author of *Skin Rules*, explains that sleeping on our side or face can create unwanted "sleep lines" on our forehead, cheeks and around the eyes because repeated pressure of the face on the pillow breaks down collagen and elasticity, and ultimately, leaves fine lines. Pros and cons of each sleep position vary, our experts offer these insights:

**Back:** "I often see patients who have bad sleep apnea only on their backs, not on their side," says Albino. Studies also link back-sleeping to snoring and reflux. However, for many (without back or neck pain), lying on our back may be the most neutral and comfortable position. Comparatively, think about the restorative orientation achieved during back-lying shavasana in yoga.

**Side:** "Sleeping on your side is best for most people," Dasgupta claims.

Albino explains, "On the left side, we get less reflux and sleep apnea, but not always." Without such disruptive sleep disorders, side-sleepers and perhaps their partners may enjoy a more restful snooze. Still, we may wake occasionally to reposition because of tingling or interrupted blood flow caused by sleeping directly on a limb.

The right-side position may reduce blood pressure and be optimal for those with heart disease. Additionally, research from Stony Brook University suggests that sleeping in a side position compared to back or stomach-sleeping may more effectively open airways and remove brain waste that could help reduce the chances of developing Alzheimer's and other neurological diseases.

In regard to anti-aging in side-sleeping position versus back-sleeping, repetitively pressing, stretching and creasing facial skin increases the likelihood of developing wrinkles.

**Stomach:** Belly-sleepers may prompt breathing challenges, neck strains and wrinkles; stomach sleeping may be the worst position for spinal alignment for most people. Plus, consistently rubbing the face on tough and/or dirty fabric may lead to breakouts and other irritations.

Our snooze stance does affect our appearance and overall health, but so do consistent bed-times and avoidance of caffeine and alcohol before retiring. Some anti-aging experts propose specific bedding such as contoured pillows and satin or silk pillowcases rather than cotton, but Dasgupta isn't convinced these products effectively combat aging. "Your sleep environment should be quiet and relaxing. What is most important is that it provides a dark, cool space to allow you to relax," he says. "As long as you aren't waking up in the middle of the night or tired and achy when you wake up, then it is doing its job."

*Village Sleep Lab is located at 1400 U.S. Hwy. 441 N., Ste. 942, in The Villages, FL. For more information, call 352-751-4955 or visit [VillageSleepLab.com](http://VillageSleepLab.com).*