



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



A Drink or Two Before Bed Likely to Produce Fitful Night of Sleep

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today, we explore the relationship between drinking alcohol and sleep.***

It is common knowledge that alcohol is a depressant, causing brain activity to slow and promoting feelings of relaxation and sleepiness. Not as well known, though, is the seemingly counterintuitive fact that alcohol consumption, especially in excess, can have a negative effect on the amount and quality of sleep.

Those who drink a glass of wine or two before bed are likely to fall asleep faster than if they didn't drink. But there is a good chance that sleep will be fitful throughout the night. Why? Alcohol has been proven to wreak havoc on your sleep cycle, the phases of deep and light sleep you progress through each night.

Early in the night, when alcohol is coursing through your body, you sleep deeply. Alcohol affects gamma-aminobutyric acid, a neurotransmitter that lowers impulses between nerve cells. Alcohol also suppresses rapid-eye movement, or REM, sleep, which is when you most often dream, in the early sleep cycles.

As the night goes on and enzymes in the liver metabolize alcohol, the brain wakes up, leaving the body restless and inducing more vivid and stressful dreams. The result is a decrease in sleep quality, which shortens sleep duration and increases disruptions.

Also, because alcohol is a diuretic, you may find yourself visiting the bathroom when you could be sleeping. There is evidence as well that people snore more after drinking because alcohol relaxes muscles in the throat, disrupting normal breathing. This can be dangerous for those who suffer from sleep apnea.

A 2018 study published in JMIR Mental Health attempted to quantify alcohol's effects on sleep.

The findings:

- Low amounts of alcohol (fewer than two servings per day for men, fewer than one serving per day for women) decreased sleep quality by 9.3 percent.
- Moderate amounts of alcohol (two servings per day for men, one serving per day for women) decreased sleep quality by 24 percent.
- High amounts of alcohol (more than two servings per day for men, more than one serving per day for women) decreased sleep quality by 39.2 percent.

To avoid alcohol's negative effects on sleep, BHI faculty and sleep expert, Dr. Michael Breus (visit his website [here](#)) says you should stop drinking at least four hours before bedtime.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

If you would like to cut down on your alcohol intake for better sleep, or for any other reason, the BHI offers these tips:

- **KEEP RECORDS.** Record in a drinking diary what you drank and how much for several weeks to get a true sense of where you stand.
- **MAKE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT.** Set a limit on how much you will drink and how much money you will spend on alcohol.
- **GET IT OUT OF YOUR HOUSE.** Making sure there is no alcohol at home helps you limit drinking to social occasions.
- **DILUTE AND SAVOR.** Add sparkling water and ice to your wine or cocktail and sip slowly.
- **ALWAYS PAIR WITH FOOD.** Never drink on an empty stomach.
- **DESIGNATE ALCOHOL-FREE DAYS.** Pick a few days a week and eliminate alcohol intake.
- **AVOID PEER PRESSURE.** Limit your time with people who tempt you or encourage you to drink.
- **DO OTHER THINGS.** If you drink when you have nothing better to do, pick up a new hobby or find other activities you enjoy.

BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a **lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:

- Stress resilience
- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Sleep
- Social connection
- Emotional well-being
- Meaning and Purpose
- Cognitive stimulation and creativity
- Engaging with nature
- General health
- Positive impacts

Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative, Inc. (BHI), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that promote brain healthy lifestyles, foster protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes at the individual and community level for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. ***Brain Health Matters and Lifestyle Makes a Difference.***