

# Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.



ESTHER BUSH

## Sleep Health

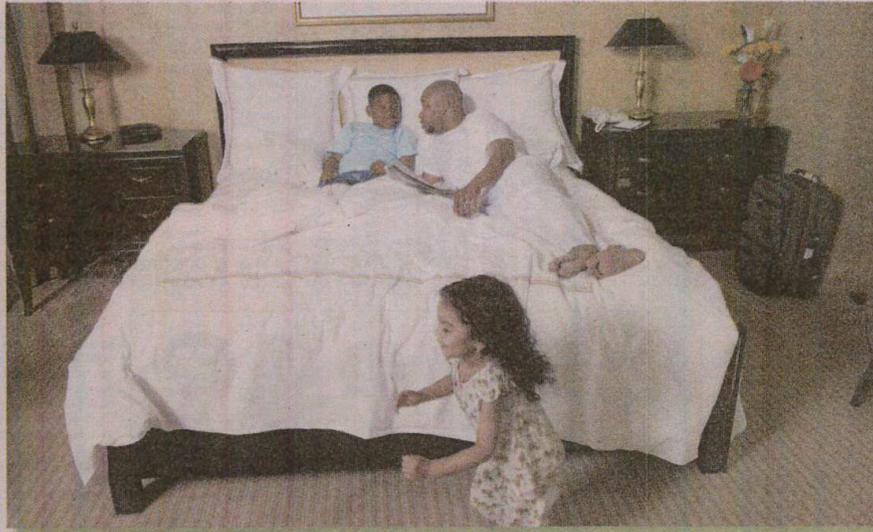
August begins the fifth year of this monthly series and partnership among the New Pittsburgh Courier, Community PARTners (a core service of the University of Pittsburgh's Clinical and Translational Science Institute—CTSI), the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and the UPMC Center for Engagement and Inclusion. These pages provide you with valuable research information on health topics that may affect you, your family or friends and connect you to research opportunities and local health resources. All articles can be accessed online at the New Pittsburgh Courier website.

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on the importance of sleep and how it affects our overall health. Jennifer R. Jones, MPH, community engagement coordinator at Pitt and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League, discussed this important topic. **JJ:** Good morning, Ms. Bush. I'm excited to sit down with you as we begin our fifth year of these "Take Charge of Your Health Today" pages! Can you believe it has been that long?

**EB:** Jennifer, I'm thrilled to see these health pages continuing in the Courier. I'm so proud of this partnership. Providing the community with current research information on important health topics is fundamental to our mission of working to enable African Americans to achieve self-reliance.

**JJ:** We're proud to partner with you in that work, Ms. Bush. There's so much research happening at the University of Pittsburgh and throughout Allegheny County, and the community needs to know about it. I know that each month I learn something new! Our August page focuses on the importance of sleep. Prior to this month, I didn't think much about how important sleep really is to our bodies and our health.

**EB:** Believe me, Jennifer, I respect the value of sleep. I know that I probably don't sleep the recommended seven hours each night. Dr. Buysse emphasizes a few key things about sleep. Sleep research shows that adults who don't get enough sleep have higher rates of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and obesity. We need to start talking about sleep importance, just as we know we need to eat healthy and exercise regularly. Our brains



## The importance of sleep and how it affects our overall health

We've all heard the saying, "I'll sleep when I'm dead." It seems easy to go without a lot of sleep, thanks to television, social media, household chores or any number of tasks that fill up our days and nights. But, according to researchers, we're doing our health a great disservice by not prioritizing sleep.

"Sleep was one of the earliest behavioral risk factors identified by researchers," says Daniel J. Buysse, MD, UPMC Professor of Sleep Medicine and professor of psychiatry and of clinical and translational science at the University of Pittsburgh. "We know other behavioral risk factors get a lot of attention—diet, exercise and smoking, for example—but sleep is one of the pillars of health."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), not getting enough sleep is a public health epidemic. The CDC reports that one-third of adult Americans get fewer than seven hours of sleep a night and one-third of adults are sleepy during daylight hours every day.

On a basic level, sleep helps people feel better overall. But research shows that sleep is important in helping the brain work properly. During sleep, the brain creates new pathways that help with memory, learning and emotional behavior. Sleep aids genes that contribute to the health and repair of cells throughout the body. It helps our bodies fight off disease. It's essential in healthy growth and development in infants and children.

Researchers have proven that adults who don't get enough sleep have higher rates of diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, depression and mortality. People are less productive at work and school

and have a more negative attitude and dramatic impact on virtually every brain function," says Dr. Buysse. "We've done studies of people in a lab setting and restricted their sleep. People report feeling sleepy, but then their sleepiness levels off. But when we're measuring how well they're performing at a task, they just get worse and worse. People who are sleep deprived lose the ability to recognize how impaired they are."

The amount of sleep people get is only one part of the sleep health puzzle, says Dr. Buysse. "The timing and regularity of sleep are also important. The same amount of sleep at the wrong time of day is associated with poor health outcomes. Studies in young people and adults show that a variable day-to-day sleep pattern, regardless of how long it is, can also affect health negatively."

adolescence. It's important because data that show that short sleep times and earlier school start times are associated with worse standardized test performance, motor vehicle accidents and even with suicide. It's not a trivial matter.

"As they get older, people get and are capable of less sleep. Older adults are also subject to more sleep disorders and end up with more health conditions and on more medications, which can also adversely affect their sleep. It's kind of a two-way street."

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recently reported that certain racial/ethnic groups experience sleep health disparities. African-Americans are most likely to have sleep duration of fewer than six hours. They are more likely than Whites to have sleep apnea syndrome, poor sleep quality and daytime sleepiness. Latinos and Chinese are more likely than Whites to have sleep-disordered breathing and short sleep duration.

What can people do to improve their sleep health? The American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the Sleep Research Society recommend that adults get at least seven hours of sleep on a regular, nightly basis for optimal health. Also, "sleep should be centered in the middle of the night so that the middle of people's sleep is 3-4 a.m.," says Dr. Buysse. "People should get regular sleep from day to day. If you have problems with sleepiness or difficulty sleeping at night, see your health care provider because your problems could be caused by a sleep disorder. For so many years, people thought that snoring was a sign of really deep, good sleep, and it turns out not to be true at all. Snoring can



**"They (Adolescents) are more naturally night owls. At the same time, our schools start classes earlier and earlier. It's a perfect storm of inadequate sleep in adolescence. It's important because data that show that short sleep times and earlier school start times are associated with worse standardized test performance, motor vehicle accidents and even with suicide. It's not a trivial matter."**

DANIEL J. BUYSSE, MD

Staying up too late isn't the only reason for a lack of sleep. Sleep disorders—such as insomnia (when it's hard to fall asleep or stay asleep), restless leg syndrome (an

The amount of sleep people get and need changes as a function of age. Infants and young children need the most sleep. Adolescents still need a lot of sleep but face a