Chronic sleep deprivation has been identified as a risk factor for Alzheimer’s disease. Sleep disorders and chronic short sleep (defined as someone who sleeps less than 6 hours a night) are associated with an increased risk of:
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure and stroke
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Temporary fatigue
- Disorientation

Lack of sleep may also lead to micro-sleep, brief moments of sleep (1-30 seconds) where you fail to respond to some sensory input and become unconscious, that occur when you’re normally awake. Have you ever driven and not remembered part of the trip? If so, you may have experienced micro-sleep. This is especially dangerous when driving. Driver sleepiness is a factor in over 100,000 car accidents each year.

To improve sleep habits, it may help to:
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Try to keep the same sleep schedule on weeknights and weekends to avoid disrupting your body clock’s sleep–wake rhythm.
- Use the hour before bed for quiet time.
- Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual.
- Turn off electronics before bed.
- Avoid heavy or large meals within a couple hours of bedtime.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed. Alcohol disrupts sleep patterns.
- Avoid nicotine and caffeine; both are stimulants that can keep you awake.
- Spend time outside every day (when possible) and be physically active.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, cool and dark (a dim night light is fine, if needed).

If you’re worried about whether you’re getting enough sleep, try keeping a sleep diary for a couple of weeks. Track how many hours you slept and how sleepy you are during the day. Discuss it with your doctor.

Your mind and body will be healthier and safer!