

The people who need very little sleep



What would you do if you had 60 days of extra free time a year? Ask Abby Ross, a retired psychologist from Miami, Florida, a “short-sleeper”. She needs only four hours sleep a night, so she has a lot of spare time to fill while the rest of the world is resting. ***“It’s wonderful to have so many hours in my day – I feel like I can live two lives,”*** she asserts.

Scientists have discovered that this phenomenon is due to a tiny mutation in a gene called *DEC2* that is present in those who are short-sleepers.

Sleeping is essential because the brain needs to do some housekeeping and general maintenance, since it doesn’t get much downtime during the day. While we sleep, the brain can repair cellular damage and remove toxins that accumulate during the day.

“Clearly people with the DEC2 mutation can do the same cleaning up process in a shorter period of time – they are just more efficient than the rest of us at sleeping,” a specialist on the matter explains.

A positive attitude is common among all of the short-sleepers. ***“Anecdotally,”*** the specialist discloses, ***“they are all very energetic, very optimistic. It’s very common for them to feel like they want to squeeze as much into life as they can, but we’re not sure how or whether this is related to their mutations.”***

Ross would seem to fit that mould. ***“I always feel great when I wake up,”*** she reveals. She has been living on four to five hours sleep every day for as long as she can remember. ***“Those hours in the morning – around five o’clock – are just fabulous. It’s so peaceful and quiet and you can get so much done.”*** Abby expresses.

Now, if she ever oversleeps – which has only ever happened a handful of times, her husband thinks she’s dead. ***“I just don’t sleep in, I’d feel terrible if I did,”*** she admits.

Answer the following questions below.

Once you have finished reading, answer the questions about the text.

Check ☒ the correct answer:

Short-sleeping is:

- a) unhealthy.
- b) genetic.
- c) contagious.

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Abby Ross needs ___ of sleep

- a) 10-11hours.
- b) 4-5 hours.
- c) 8-9 hours.

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Short-sleeping is caused by:

- a) a mutation.
- b) an infection.
- c) a drug.

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During sleep, the brain:

- a) does general maintenance.
- b) restarts the whole body.
- c) erases our memories.

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Sleep is important because:

- a) it repairs cellular damage.
- b) dreaming is necessary.
- c) it allows people to grow.

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Shorts-sleepers are:

- a) bad at sleeping.
- b) not able to sleep.
- c) more efficient at sleeping.

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Shorts-sleepers tend to be:

- a) lazy and tired
- b) productive and energetic
- c) mean and bitter

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Shorts-sleepers usually feel:

- a) resentful for sleeping less
- b) optimistic for having more time
- c) sad for not sleeping well

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Ross describes early mornings as:

- a) sad and ugly.
- b) irritating and loud
- c) peaceful and quiet

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Reflect on the following questions.

2. Do you think you have a healthy and normal sleeping schedule?

2. What do they mean by the brain doing 'housekeeping'?

3. Why does the brain doesn't get much 'downtime' during the day?

4. Why are short sleepers considered better at sleeping?

5. "Ross seems to fit that mould" refers to...

6. Why do you think shorts sleepers are so lively and energetic?
