

## **Sleep Is More Important Than Food**

*by Tony Schwartz*

Say you decide to go on a fast, and you effectively starve yourself for a week. At the end of seven days, how would you be feeling? You'd be hungry, perhaps a little weak, and almost certainly somewhat thinner, but basically you'd be fine.

Now let's say you deprive yourself of sleep for a week. Not so good. After several days, you'd be almost completely unable to function. That's why Amnesty International lists sleep deprivation as a form of torture.

So why is sleep one of the first things we're willing to sacrifice as the demands in our lives keep rising? We continue to live by a remarkably durable myth: Sleeping one hour less will give us one more hour of productivity. In reality, the research suggests that even small amounts of sleep deprivation take a significant toll on our health, our mood, our cognitive capacity, and our productivity.

Many of the effects we suffer are invisible. Insufficient sleep, for example, deeply impairs our ability to consolidate and stabilize learning that occurs during the waking day. In other words, it wreaks havoc on our memory. So how much sleep do you need? When researchers put test subjects in environments without clocks or windows and ask them to sleep any time they feel tired, 95% sleep between seven and eight hours out of every 24. Another 2.5% sleep more than eight hours. That means just 2.5% of us require less than seven hours of sleep a night to feel fully rested. That's one out of every 40 people.

In my talks, when I ask people how many had fewer than seven hours of sleep several nights during the past week, the vast majority raise their hands. That's true whether it's an audience of corporate executives, teachers, cops, or government workers.

Great performers are an exception. Typically, they sleep significantly more than the rest of us. In Anders Ericsson's famous study of violinists, the top performers slept an average of eight and a half hours out of every 24, including a 20- to 30-minute midafternoon nap—some two hours a day more than the average American.