

Sleep Hygiene

Helpful Hints for Better Sleeping



UHN



When you are fatigued, you often want to sleep, but have trouble actually doing so. There are several ways to determine if you are having problems sleeping.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you have difficulty falling asleep?
- Do you wake up at night and can't go back to sleep?
- Do you worry about things and have trouble relaxing while in bed?
- Despite sleeping all night, do you feel you are not refreshed when you wake?
- Do you wake up earlier in the morning than you would like?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, this pamphlet includes some suggestions that might help you sleep. It may seem overwhelming to think about trying everything suggested here, so just try one suggestion at a time. Pick the one that you think might help the most, and then work through the list. It is good to try one thing at a time so you can tell what works best for you.

Treat problems that disturb sleep

- Depression, anxiety and stress can affect your sleep, as well, difficulty sleeping can be a symptom of other conditions.
- Ask your family doctor or other supports if these issues could be part of your sleep problem.

Check with your doctor about your medications

- Some heart, blood pressure, asthma, anxiety or depression medications can sometimes disrupt sleep.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if you can alter the time of day you take your medications so they are less likely to interfere with sleep.

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Created: 10/2008

Form: D-5536



- Remember to ask about any herbal or over the counter medications you may be taking because they might be affecting your sleep as well.

Exercise regularly

- Exercising can decrease fatigue.
- Regular exercise helps you to sleep better.
- It is best not to exercise during the 2-4 hours (some literature states 5-6 hours) before you go to sleep at night.
- Review the Exercise Tips pamphlet for suggestions about exercise.

Exposure to sunlight

- Daylight is important in regulating sleep patterns.
- Try to get outside in natural sunlight for 30 minutes per day. (Remember to wear sunscreen.)

Avoid or limit caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol 4-6 hours before you go to sleep

- Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to go to sleep.
- Coffee, black, green and iced teas, cocoa, chocolate, soft drinks like colas and Mountain Dew and some prescriptions drugs contain caffeine.
- The stimulating effect of caffeine can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully.
- Cigarettes and some drugs contain nicotine (nicorette, Nico derm).
- Alcohol may seem helpful in the beginning as it slows brain activity, but you end up having fragmented sleep so avoid alcohol before bed.

Limit the use of sedatives

- Your doctor may give you sleeping pills or sedatives to help you sleep. It is advisable that you regard this as temporary rather than a permanent fix.

Avoid excessive fluids before going to sleep

- Limit fluids for 2 hours before going to sleep.

Maintain consistent times for going to bed and getting up

- If you do not fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, then get up and do something boring. For example, keep dull reading material close by (e.g., manual for your refrigerator or high school physics textbook).

Establish pre sleep rituals

- Reading for a few minutes before you go to sleep.
- Listening to relaxing music.
- Doing relaxation exercises.
- A hot bath 90 minutes before going to sleep will raise your body temperature; the subsequent drop in body temperature may leave you feeling sleepy.

- If you feel hungry at bedtime, have a light snack, like ½ cup of milk.
NOTE: A heavy meal within 2 hours of bedtime can interfere with sleep.
- Find what works for you.

Comfort

- Temperature of your room should be comfortable for you – generally speaking it is better to have the room a little cool and have enough blankets to keep you warm.
- Get into your favourite sleeping position.
- Block out distracting noise and lights.
- Use room-darkening shade to ensure bedroom is completely dark.
- TV is engaging and tends to keep you awake—avoid it. Use your bed for sleeping and sexual activity only, not as an office, workroom or recreation room.
- Teach your body to “know” that the bed is for sleeping.

Relaxation Techniques

- Try relaxation techniques as outlined in the Relaxation Techniques Pamphlet to help with relaxation during the day or help you fall asleep at night.

Excessive Rest can worsen Fatigue

- If you sleep or are inactive all day you will likely have trouble sleeping at night. (See notes on exercise).

Plan power naps

- If you can't make it through the day without a nap make sure you sleep less than 60 minutes (preferably 30-45 minutes) BEFORE 3pm.

Resources

Canadian Sleep Society <http://www.css.to/sleep/brochures.htm> - brochures_eng

University of Maryland Medical Center Sleep Disorders Center
http://www.umm.edu/sleep/sleep_hyg.html

Diagnostic Classification Steering Committee, Thorpy MJ, Chairman. International Classification of Sleep Disorders: Diagnostic and Coding Manual. Rochester, Minnesota: American Sleep Disorders Association, 1990. and Kryger, Meir H., Roth, Thomas, Dement, William C. Principles and Practice of Sleep Medicine, 2nd Edition. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: W.B. Saunders Company, 1994.
<http://www.stanford.edu/~dement/howto.html>

Your Guide to Healthy Sleep

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sleepdisorders.html>