

SLEEP HYGIENE

Good Sleep Is Essential For Your Health!

Everyone needs a good night's sleep for their wellbeing. Children and teenagers require even more sleep. If an adult is not getting 7-8 hours of rest per night they may become distressed, depressed, tired, or irritable and have difficulty concentrating. Sleep hygiene are habits that help you to have a good night's sleep. Common sleeping problems are often caused by bad habits reinforced over months or even years. You can dramatically improve your sleep quality by making a few adjustments to your lifestyle and attitude.

Obey Your Body Clock

The body's alternating sleep-wake cycle is controlled by an internal 'clock' within the brain. Erratic sleep habits disturb the cycle. Work with your body clock:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day to help 'set' your body clock.
- Don't ignore tiredness. Go to bed when your body tells you it's ready. Nap for only 10-30 min during the day.
- If you can't fall asleep within a reasonable amount of time, get out of bed and do something relaxing such as read a book.
- Wake up in the morning with bright lights to set your body's internal clock.
- Get enough sunshine during the day to set your body clock.

Improve Your Sleeping Environment

Good sleep is more likely if your bedroom feels restful and comfortable. Suggestions include:

- Invest in a mattress or pillow that is neither too hard nor too soft.
- Make sure the room is at the right temperature.
- Ensure the room is dark enough.
- If you can't control noise (such as barking dogs or loud neighbors), invest in a pair of earplugs.
- Only use your bedroom for sleeping and sex. Don't watch TV or study in bed. If you treat your bed like a lounge your mind will associate your bedroom with activity.

Avoid Drugs

Some people resort to medications or social drugs in the mistaken belief that sleep will be more likely. Common pitfalls include:

- Use of Stimulants - Caffeine in coffee, tea, chocolate and sodas should not be consumed within 6 hours of bedtime and not more than 4 servings per day. Tobacco contains nicotine which increases heart rate and blood pressure that interfere with sleep.
- Use of Alcohol - Alcohol is a depressant drug which slows the function of the nervous system. Drinking before bed may help you to doze off, but alcohol disturbs

the rhythm of sleep patterns so you won't feel refreshed in the morning. Other drawbacks include waking frequently to go to the toilet, hangovers and early morning awakenings. Drink in moderation.

- Sleeping pills - drawbacks include daytime sleepiness and difficulty falling asleep without them after using them habitually. These drugs should only be used temporarily and under medical advice.
- Other medications can also cause sleeping problems, especially diet and cold pills. Check with your health care provider or pharmacist if you suspect your medications may be disturbing your sleep.

Relax Your Mind

In order to relax your mind try the following techniques:

- Try not to engage in mentally stimulating activities close to bedtime. Use the last hour or so before sleep to relax your mind.
- Consciously relax every part of your body, starting with your toes and working up to your scalp.
- Picture peaceful scenery, concentrate on the rhythmic rise and fall of your breathing, or focus on a mantra.
- If you are a chronic worrier, try scheduling a half hour of 'worry time' well before bed. Once you retire, remind yourself that you've already done your worrying for the day.
- A "To Do" list can help you prioritize your busy life and reduce anxiety.

General Suggestions

Other lifestyle adjustments that may help improve your sleep include:

- Exercise every day, at least 3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid large meals and excessive fluid intake before bedtime.
- Take a warm bath.
- Turn your alarm clock to the wall. Watching the minutes tick by may keep you awake.
- If you have tried and failed to improve your sleep, you should consider professional help.
- Some medical conditions that can interfere with sleep include allergies, colds, sleep apnea, insomnia, indigestion, obesity, depression and pain.

Things To Remember

Sleep hygiene means habits that help you have a good nights sleep. Good sleep increases creativity and problem solving skills! Common sleeping problems are often caused by bad habits reinforced over time. If you have tried and failed to improve your sleep, see your doctor.