

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Difficulty sleeping is a problem that can seriously affect your concentration, energy level, health, mood and productivity. When we lose sleep, we put ourselves and those around us at increased risk for accidents. Good sleep doesn't just happen. You may have some bad sleeping habits. Fortunately, there are things you can do to improve your sleep.

Investigate

If you have difficulties falling or staying asleep, the first step to solving your problems requires detective work. Look for connections between your ability to sleep and your diet, exercise patterns, sleeping environment or worries. For example, you may see a connection between what you eat, and nights of poor sleep. Discovering these connections will help you develop your own sleep plan.

How much sleep do I need?

The amount of sleep recommended per night for adults is 7-8 hours. However, many people only need 6 hours, while others need 9 hours, so the normal range is 6-9 hours. To a great degree, the amount of sleep we need is determined by our heredity. Infants and teens have increased sleep needs due to developmental changes. Sleeping too much can cause you to be tired all day, so avoid oversleeping unless you're body needs to catch up on lost sleep from the week.

Sleep Tips

- Establish a bedtime "ritual" so that the ritual will tell your body it is now time to rest: read, do yoga, drink warm milk (it makes you sleepy), or take a warm (not hot) bath (not shower). Going to bed and getting up at the same time every day is also advisable, even on weekends.
- If you are unable to fall asleep within 20-30 minutes of lying down, get up and do something else until you are tired. This way your body will not associate the bed with wakefulness.
- While in bed, don't dwell on not sleeping or your anxiety will increase. Set your alarm then hide the clock so you can't watch the time.
- Write down your worries and any anxious thoughts. Put your dreams in writing too, describing them as vividly as possible.
- Don't use your bedroom as a place to work. The bedroom should be associated with sleep.

- Use a firm mattress, keep the bedroom dark, cool, and adjust the humidity level (too low or high can disrupt sleep).
- Exercise regularly during the day and avoid taking naps.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine.
- Drink less fluids and use the bathroom before going to bed.
- Practice the relaxation exercises included in this brochure.

Noise Reduction

If noise is disturbing your sleep, consider:

- Ear plugs
- White noise from a fan or other noise-making machine
- Relaxing music played at low volume
- Double-pane windows and heavy drapes

Relaxation Techniques

- While lying in bed, focus on your exhalations as you breath and relax. Feel your entire body being supported by the bed and continue to focus on exhaling and relaxing. Mentally move through each part of your body and identify any sensations you may feel (warmth, coolness, tension, stillness, heaviness). As you wander through the body in search of sensations, the mind will focus inward and sleep will result.
- While lying in bed, focus on your exhalations as you breath and relax. Feel your entire body being supported by the bed and continue to focus on exhaling and relaxing. Count the exhalations backwards from ninety-nine.
- While lying comfortably, tighten each of the muscles in your body one set at a time. Start by gently flexing the calves for 5 seconds. Then flex your thighs...squeeze your fists... then your biceps. Work your way through all the muscles you can flex in your body, holding each one for 5 seconds then releasing.

Source: www.dbhds.virginia.gov/library/todelete/sleeptips.doc