



### Sleep

Sleep is our body's natural mechanism for restoring and maintaining physical and emotional health. While individuals differ in the amount of sleep they need, most experts would agree that at least 7-7.5 hours is optimal for the average adult (more for children). Both the quantity and quality of sleep are important.

Occasional disturbance in sleep patterns due to stress, illness or situational demands are common and of little significance, however if they become prolonged or chronic they increase the risk of emotional or physical health problems, as well as increasing the risk of accidents or injuries at home or work. Sleep disturbance may also occur as a symptom of many health problems (e.g. back pain, apnea, depression). Chronic or severe sleep difficulties require medical diagnosis and treatment.

Good sleep habits are skills that can be learned. The following 'sleep hygiene' tips will help get restful, restorative sleep:

- **Set a standard time for bed.** Your body gets accustomed to falling asleep at certain times so you need to set up a predictable pattern. Do not be one of those people who allow bedtime and awakening time to drift. Try to set a bedtime and stick to it, even on weekends or if you are on vacation.
- **Set a standard rising time.** Get up at the same time each day even if you feel the urge to sleep in (and even if you went to bed later than usual). Even on weekends. Getting out of bed may seem like a strange way of getting more sleep, but the type of sleep you get in the early morning is not really all that helpful anyway. Having a standard rising time will help set your internal clock.
- **Save your bedroom for sleep.** Don't use the bed as an office, workroom or recreation room. Let your body "know" that the bed is associated with sleeping (And, yes, sex).
- **Create a good sleep environment.** People generally sleep best in a room that is dark and not too hot. If noise is a problem, options include earplugs or soundproofing the room. Some people find that audio players that generate 'white noise' or sounds of nature help them to sleep.
- **Prepare for sleep.** Avoid strenuous activity, alcohol, exercise, heavy or spicy meals, and bright light for at least one hour before going to bed. Develop a ritual before bed, some light reading, a warm bath or gentle stretching or yoga. Warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas, may help you to sleep.
- **Practice deep breathing or mental relaxation exercises to get to sleep.** It can be tempting to use the time spent lying in bed to think about problems or your plans for the next day. This will keep you awake, not put you to sleep. If there is something you need to remember, write it down and put it aside well before you go to bed.
- **Get comfortable.** If you don't fall asleep within 15–20 minutes, get up, go into another room, and read until sleepy. Avoid checking your emails, surfing the net, watching stimulating television.

- **Avoid napping.** If you nap throughout the day, it may make it more difficult to sleep at night. If you do need the occasional nap, restrict it to the late afternoon and keep it to about thirty minutes. If you travel try to keep to your home sleep schedule even when you are in another time zone. Melatonin can be helpful to ‘reset’ your biological clock.
- **Avoid over-the-counter sleeping medication.** Although it may help you to fall asleep, the type of sleep you get is usually not as helpful as normal sleep. Instead, take sleeping medication only if directed by your physician. Discuss any other health problems you may have, possible side effects, the suggested duration of use and interactions with other medications.

*“Many things--such as loving, going to sleep, or behaving unaffectedly--are done worst when we try hardest to do them.”*

C.S. Lewis