

## Healthy Sleeping Habits

Healthy sleeping habits, otherwise known as sleep hygiene, is important for your overall health. Your alertness during day hours depends on getting good quality sleep. Both your mind and body depend on sleep to operate at its best. If you are having problems with poor and un-refreshing sleep, take some time to review your sleep environment. Some of the more common areas causing poor sleep are listed below.

### Stress

Stress can affect sleep such as, difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep, clenching teeth (bruxism), restless sleep, and aches and pains. Over time chronic stress can lead to poor sleep habits and worsening sleep quality. Becoming more aware of situations that cause stress may help to develop ways to avoid or lessen the effects. Before you get into bed write down your thoughts, especially worries or problems. Prior to sleeping try some relaxation techniques like, deep breathing, meditation, stretching, and prayer.

### Naps

Taking naps may actually benefit you. However, a nap should not be longer than 40 minutes. Taking 1 nap under 40 minutes is fine as long as you are able to sleep well during the night. If you are going to bed later than usual or not sleeping through the night, then eliminate the nap entirely.

### Develop Sleep Routines

Many parents develop routines with their children to help them go to sleep. Adults benefit from pre-sleep routines as well such as maintaining consistent bedtimes, doing quiet activities like reading, listening to music, or preparing the bedroom for sleeping. Routines are one way to help signal our brain that we are ready for sleep. Try to get at least seven to eight hours of sleep every night. If you have problems falling asleep, do not stay in bed. Get out of bed and do quiet, relaxing activities until you start to feel sleepy.

### Sleep Environment

Putting thought into sleep seems to be the last thing on many people's minds these days. We spend many hours of our lives sleeping and depend on sleep to restore us for the next day, but yet we rarely put thought into where or how we sleep. Let's take a look at two important areas that help us sleep:

#### BED

Everyone has their own idea about what makes a good bed (water beds, coil mattresses, or foam mattresses) but whatever type of bed you choose should be in good repair, not put pressure on your joints, and minimize bed movement. On the topic of minimizing bed movement, pets should sleep in their own bed because they often move about at night causing disturbances we may be unaware of. Keep your bed for sleeping or sex only. Working on home or job projects in bed will not help you relate your bed to a relaxing place of rest.

#### ROOM

The best sleeping environment is a cool room (not cold), dark, limited noise, and a comfortable sleeping surface. Having a dark room keeps light away from our eyes that naturally signals us to wake up. Some noise may be unavoidable but unusual or excessively loud noises will disturb sleep. Use of a fan to create "white" noise is helpful and may block out alerting or unusual noises.

## Food

What you eat can greatly affect your sleep. For example, keep from drinking beverages with caffeine at least four to six hours before bed. Some people are more sensitive to caffeine and should limit their intake more than six hours. Consuming too much caffeine too close to bedtime can cause restlessness and poor sleep quality. It has been said by some they could drink caffeinated beverages all day and still fall asleep. Since caffeine is a stimulant it may cause increased arousals and disturbed sleep leading to continued overconsumption of caffeine to maintain alertness during the day.

Try to avoid eating two hours before bedtime and eat smaller evening meals. Consuming large meals before bedtime can cause reflux problems and disturb sleep. A light snack before bed such as a banana, cup of yogurt, or piece of toast is fine but keep the amount small.

Alcohol consumed before bedtime can decrease muscle activity in the airway making it more likely for breathing problems to develop. Nicotine from smoking is a stimulant and can cause disturbances in sleeping. To improve sleep, limit smoking prior to bedtime or stop smoking for improved sleep.

## Medications

For some, the use of an occasional sleep aid may be beneficial. At some point everyone experiences problems getting to sleep or staying asleep, and that is normal. However, when these problems persist, use of medication to sleep can help restore normal sleep patterns. Unfortunately for some the use of sleeping medication beyond the initial problem can become a habit. Sleeping medication should only be used for a short time. If the problem of going to sleep or staying asleep continues then a sleep specialist should be consulted.

For more information on improving  
your sleep, please call **402-219-8742**.

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