

SLEEP HYGIENE TIPS

FALLING ASLEEP:

If you can't get to sleep, rather than trying harder and harder to fall asleep, try getting out of bed and doing something else. Preferably, move to another room and return to bed only when sleepy.

If you have trouble getting to sleep, establish a routine for an hour or so each night before bedtime, such as reading, taking a warm shower or bath, light exercise, or resting quietly.

Avoid too much mental stimulation during the hour or so prior to bedtime. Read a light novel or watch a relaxing TV program: do not finish office work or discuss family finances with your spouse, for example.

STRESS:

Almost everyone experiences an occasional night of lost or disturbed sleep. It is a natural, perhaps adaptive, response to acute stress.

NAPS:

If you are having trouble falling asleep at night, avoid naps in the early afternoon or early evening.

GETTING UP:

No matter how poorly you have slept the night before, always set your alarm to arise at the same time each morning.

EXERCISE:

Regular exercise can be an effective aid to sleep. It releases energy and mental tensions. It is better not to exercise strenuously just before bedtime.

NOISES:

Occasional loud noises from aircraft, streets, or highways disturb sleep even in people who do not awaken and who cannot remember the noise in the morning. These sleep disturbances can reduced restful sleep. People who sleep near excessive noise should try heavy curtains in their bedrooms or ear plugs to protect the amount of restful sleep they get.

HUNGER:

Hunger may disturb sleep. A light snack especially warm milk seems to help people get to sleep.

FOOD:

Various foods stimulate the body and disturb sleep. Avoid coffee, tea and cola drinks near bedtime. Avoid late heavy meals.

SLEEP PATTERNS:

Everyone has a unique sleeping pattern. Some adults need 10 hours a night. Other adults need only 5 hours a night. Many people function best with approximately 8 hours of sleep. Your requirement for sleep is unique. What is effective for your husband, your wife, or your friends is not what may be helpful to you. If you need only 5 hours of sleep a night, do not worry about it, or try to force longer sleeping hours. Instead, learn to use your extra waking hours for something you would like to do or get done.

QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

Everyone's sleep needs change. The amount and quality of sleep varies in the course of each person's life. The infant may require 16 hours of sleep each day; an elderly person may sleep 3 to 4 hours at night with frequent naps during the day. Changes in the length and depth of sleep are a normal part of life. Within limits the quality of our sleep is more important than quantity.

SYMPTOM OF A MEDICAL PROBLEM:

Sleeping problems may signal a medical condition such as anxiety, depression, and other disorders. It is important to get a proper diagnosis and treatment of the underlying cause of a chronic sleep disturbance.

PREGNANCY:

Excessive sleepiness the first 3 months of pregnancy is normal; don't worry about it. Pregnant women also tend to sleep about two more hours at night.

MEDICATIONS/ALCOHOL:

An occasional sleeping pill may be of some benefit, but chronic (nightly) use of sleeping pills may actually hinder good sleep. Natural sleep is the best sleep.

Sleeping medications should be used with caution and only upon the advice of a physician by the elderly, pregnant women, people with respiratory disease, kidney disease, or a liver impairment.

If your doctor prescribes a sleep medication, ask for clear directions and information about the particular drug you are to take. Some sleeping pills have a prolonged effect, and can impair your coordination and driving skills the following day.

Sleep medication should be used only for the short term management of a sleep complaint. Do not self medicate or increase the dosage yourself. If you feel that your medication is losing its effect, report this to your doctor.

Although alcohol may help to induce sleep, the chronic use of larger quantities of alcohol causes disturbed sleep and dependency.

Dr. Carlos Rodriguez

Respirologist, Sleep Specialist & Medical Director