

## ***CAN'T SLEEP?***



Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to sleep. Tossing and turning. Your mind is racing, going over everything that happened today. Night noises keep you awake. What can you do? There ARE things you can do! Read on and learn some new tricks to sleep well. These tips are also known as "Sleep Hygiene." REMEMBER: SLEEP IS PRODUCTIVE

- **Get up and go to bed the same time every day**

If there is one thing to change first, it would be to wake up at the same time every morning. Even on weekends! (or at least do not sleep 1hr past your regular wake up time) For teens/adults, aim for at least 8-9 hrs of sleep (for those doing intense physical activity, 10 hours is not too much). When your sleep cycle has a regular rhythm, you will feel better. If you are tossing and turning in bed for ½ to 1 hour, get up out of bed and go to another part of the room or the house and do something quiet/relaxing until you feel sleepy—then return to bed. You want to associate bed with sleepiness, not frustration.

- **Don't take naps**

This will ensure you are tired at bedtime. If you just can't make it through the day without a nap, take one for 10-30min to help restore energy and focus if you hit a mid-afternoon lull.

- **Refrain from exercise at least 2 hours before bedtime**

Regular exercise is recommended to help you sleep well, but the timing of the workout is important. Exercising in the morning or early afternoon will not interfere with sleep.

- **Develop sleep rituals**

It is important to give your body cues that it is time to slow down and sleep. Listen to relaxing music, read or read to your child something soothing for 15 minutes, do relaxation exercises such as mediation or relaxation breathing. If you struggle with a racing mind, try a brief mindfulness meditation session prior to bed.

- **Only use your bed for sleeping**

Keep your smartphone OUT of the bedroom entirely. Not on silent. Out. Refrain from using your bed to watch TV/play video games, pay bills, do work or reading. So when you go to bed your body knows it is time to sleep. Avoid TV/Video Games/Computer Screen Time at least 1hr before bedtime. You may even dim the lights around the house an hour or so before bedtime.

- **Stay away from caffeine, (For adults) nicotine and alcohol at least 5-6 hours before bed**

Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Coffee, tea, cola, cocoa, chocolate and some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine. Cigarettes and some drugs contain nicotine. Alcohol may seem to help you sleep in the beginning as it slows brain activity, but you will end up having fragmented sleep.

- **Have a light snack before bed**

If your stomach is too empty, that can interfere with sleep. However, if you eat a heavy meal before bedtime, that can interfere as well. Dairy products and turkey contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer. Tryptophan is probably why a warm glass of milk is sometimes recommended.

- **Take a hot bath 90 minutes before bedtime**

A hot bath will raise your body temperature, but it is the *drop* in body temperature that may leave you feeling sleepy.

- **Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable**

Keep your room as dark as possible. A hot room can be uncomfortable. A cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm is recommended. If light in the early morning bothers you, get a blackout shade or wear a slumber mask. If noise bothers you, wear earplugs or get a "white noise" machine.

- **Use sunlight to set your biological clock**

Ensure you expose yourself to natural (i.e., non-electric) light throughout the day. This will help you maintain a healthy circadian rhythm. In the morning, once you wake up, consider turning your face towards sunlight for 15min.

Melatonin (a hormone your brain secretes in response to nighttime cues) may be helpful to try until your sleep gets regulated. It is quite safe to use unless you or your child has an underlying seizure disorder (talk to your doctor). Use a brand that is USP (United States Pharmacopeia), NSF International, or Consumer Lab (consumerlab.com) certified as dietary supplements are not regulated by the FDA. For children less than 5y you can start with 1-3mg one to one-half hour before bedtime, older children may start with 3mg and you may increase to desired effect—max of 10mg (Headaches, excessive sedation, and transient depression have been reported most often with doses greater than 8mg).

The Right Amount of Sleep: This varies from one individual to another. Children typically need more sleep than teenagers and teenagers typically need more sleep than adults. Studies show that your cognitive abilities are quite compromised even by missing only 30min per night of what your body needs for sleep (eg. Getting only 7 ½ hours when your body needs 8 hours). These cognitive deficits show up even though the individual does not feel tired. Getting good sleep is crucial for optimal brain development for children and teens, especially for emotional regulation. The best way to figure out the right amount of sleep for you is to spend 10-14 days (with good sleep hygiene as above) going to sleep when you are tired and waking up without an alarm clock. Take the average sleep time. That's what you need.