



CHAPTER 8: SLEEP

Balancing school, work, family, and other responsibilities can add up to sleep deprivation. For many busy adults, sleep is the element of a healthy lifestyle that most easily falls by the wayside. However, studies show that not getting enough sleep will cause problems in other aspects of your life. Sleep deprivation results in a decrease in immune system function, problems with concentration, memory impairment, and poor performance.

Here are some strategies from the National Sleep Foundation and the Mayo Clinic for getting a good night's sleep.

Sleep Strategies

- **Maintain a regular bedtime and wake time.** Our body has a clock that balances sleep and wake time. Regularity strengthens this function and can help you fall asleep at night.
- **Relax before bed.** Avoid activities that can cause excitement, stress, or anxiety before bedtime. Listening to music with the lights off, a hot bath, and meditation are all ways to relax before bed.
- **Your bedroom should be for sleep only.** If possible, keep your computer, TV, and work outside of your bedroom. Your bedroom should be quiet, dark, and comfortable for sleeping.

- **Ensure that your mattress and pillows are comfortable.** Your mattress may have exceeded its life expectancy. Flipping it could buy some time. There are many types of mattresses and pillows on the market to accommodate various sleeping preferences. Choose one that is right for you.
- **Don't eat/drink caffeine before bedtime.** It is best to finish eating 2–3 hours before attempting to fall asleep. Heavy meals and spicy foods may make you less comfortable. Caffeine is a stimulant and can disrupt your sleep. Avoid caffeine within 6–8 hours of going to bed.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise is the perfect antidote to sleepless nights. Beside everything else you have learned in this chapter about exercise, it also promotes a sounder sleep. Try to finish your exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime.
- **Make your room colder.** Your body needs to lower its temperature in order to fall asleep.
- **Block out noise and light.** Things that go bump in the night can disturb your sleep. A fan, white noise machine, or music with sounds like rain can help you block out city sounds and other jarring noises. If blinds and drapes don't make your room dark enough, consider a sleep eye mask.
- **Seek out morning sunlight.** Sunlight (or any bright light) tells your body's natural biological clock that its time to wake up, and that same clock will then be set to tell your body its time to go to sleep about 14–16 hours later.
- **Don't feel guilty about going to bed.** Sleep is an investment in your health and productivity.
- **Don't force sleep.** If you are having trouble sleeping, get out of bed and do something else until you start to feel tired. Try not to look at the clock as this may cause you to feel stress.
- **Manage stress in your life.** Unmanaged stress can lead to chronic insomnia. Find a means of managing the stress. Ideas include meditation, massage, music, or keeping a journal. Find one that works for you.
- **Keep a notebook by the bed.** Many people think of things before or during sleep. Trying to remember these things causes anxiety. Jot it down in the notebook and fall back asleep instead.
- **Use sleeping pills only as a last resort.** Sleeping pills can be habit-forming. Try the other suggestions first, and if you are still having trouble, discuss medication options with your doctor.

Many people who have sleeping problems are suffering from stress, and can benefit from reconditioning themselves to sleep using the above tips. However, if you're having problems sleeping more than three times a week for a month, you could have a sleep disorder and should discuss it with a medical professional.