

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Sleeping Soundly

One of the first things people experience when work or other demands suddenly change or become more intense is difficulty falling or staying asleep. For many of us, nighttime slumber is disrupted by thought of our “to-do” lists, worries about our workload and increasing pressures on the job, or emotional stress over family issues.

Sleep deprivation can lead to fatigue, increased stress, irritability, inability to focus and concentrate, headaches, and depression. Sleep deprivation can also contribute to a compromised immune system, making you more susceptible to getting ill more often. Fatigue due to sleeplessness may also negatively impact job performance and personal relationships.

The amount of sleep that is required is different for each individual; therefore, the quality of sleep is more important than the quantity of sleep. Whatever amount of time asleep that makes you feel refreshed and alert upon waking is typically considered adequate. For some people, this may be 5-6 hours, for others, 7-8 hours of sleep may be required.

If you are having trouble sleeping, try these tips to improve the quality of your sleep:

- ❑ **Be consistent.** Go to bed and wake up at the same time every night and day, including on the weekends and holidays.
- ❑ **Relax.** Develop a relaxing, nightly routine such as reading, listening to music, or taking a bath. Try relaxing each muscle from your toes to your head, or think of a repetitive mental routine such as counting sheep.
- ❑ **Be comfortable.** Create an environment conducive to sleep; make sure the room is quiet, dark, and comfortable.
- ❑ **Don't work at bedtime.** Do not use bedtime to do work; this includes paperwork, housework, studying, etc.
- ❑ **Exercise, but not before bedtime.** Get regular exercise during the day. Try to exercise early enough as some people find that working out in the evening is actually too stimulating, making it difficult to wind down and relax.
- ❑ **Avoid stimulants.** Caffeine, nicotine, some over-the-counter medications can keep you awake. Do not consume caffeine or other stimulants after the middle of the afternoon.
- ❑ **Watch your medications.** Ask your physician if any of your prescribed medication causes sleep disruption.

- ❑ **Cut back on alcohol.** Drinking alcohol can disturb the quality of your sleep and cause sleep disruptions throughout the night.
- ❑ **Don't nap.** Avoid naps unless you have no problem sleeping at night.
- ❑ **Get up and do something.** If you cannot get to sleep, get up and do something relaxing. Don't try to make yourself sleep. If you are unable to fall asleep after 20-30 minutes in bed, get up and engage in a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy.

If you do not see improvement in your sleep patterns after one to two weeks, consult your doctor. Your physician can explore physical or emotional causes and prescribe appropriate treatment to alleviate your sleeplessness.

Also see:

How to Manage the Stress of these Difficult Times, available at www.uhs.berkeley.edu.

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Caffeine Use

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Eating Well

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Headaches & Muscle Tension

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Staying Active

UC Berkeley, University Health Services, Tang Center
2222 Bancroft, Berkeley, CA 94720
(510) 642-6621
www.uhs.berkeley.edu