

Better Health Through Quality Sleep



Sleep is an integral part of our lives. We spend about 1/3 of our time sleeping. When we are not getting the proper amount of sleep (7-8 hours a night is recommended), it can affect our physical and mental well-being. Since we rely on sleep time to repair and reset our bodies, insufficient sleep will compromise our immune system, making us more vulnerable to illness.

Inadequate sleep can also negatively impact your mental health. Individuals could experience problems in the following areas: difficulties in making decisions, lost productivity, concentration issues, underachievement, increased accident-proneness, depression, anxiety, sexual performance issues, and fatigue. For individuals experiencing mental health issues, it can be difficult to determine whether the mental health issue is affecting sleep or if poor sleep is contributing to the mental health symptoms. Often, they happen simultaneously. Getting good sleep is essential for your overall well-being. We have included some tips on how to address sleep issues..

Things you should do:

Cut back or eliminate your alcohol consumption. Alcohol can increase symptoms of sleep apnea and disrupt our cycles. It also changes nighttime melatonin production, which plays a key role in your body's circadian rhythm.

Manage your sleep environment. This would include sheets, pillows, and your bed. Decide if your room temperature is comfortable (fresh air and a cool room temperature will provide the best sleeping conditions). Add or take away blankets.

Minimize the noise level in your room (earplugs or sound machines), and the room is darkened (nightshades could help). Eliminate or remove other sources of light, such as computers left on, televisions left on, and even alarm clocks.

Try to maintain consistent sleep schedules. Irregular sleep times can make it more difficult for your brain to transition to sleep mode.

Avoid heavy meals near bedtime. Furthermore, avoid acid-producing foods such as spices, onions, and peppers.

Cut down or eliminate caffeine. This would include chocolate, tea, and soda pops.

Decrease your activities as you approach your desired sleep time. The more active you are, the more time it will take to settle down to sleep. Individuals with jobs that require a lot of mental stimulation throughout the day have far more trouble sleeping than those who work in more physical settings. For these individuals, winding down time is especially important.

Limit daytime naps, especially if it is close to your bedtime.

Things you can do:

Having a glass of warm milk 15 minutes before bedtime will soothe your nervous system. Milk contains calcium, which aids in relaxation.

Try a cup of hot chamomile, catnip, anise, or fennel tea. All contain natural ingredients that may help you sleep.

A small, low-protein, high-carbohydrate bedtime snack, such as juice and cookies, eaten before bedtime, can help you fall asleep sooner.

Foods with large amounts of the amino acid L-tryptophan help us sleep better. These include warm or hot milk (but not cold milk), eggs, cottage cheese, chicken, turkey, and cashews.

Listen to the music. Music should be soft and soothing. There is music designed for that very purpose. Other sounds to try would be sounds of waves, wind, or other relaxing sounds. You can also wear sleep masks that allow you to listen to music while you are wearing night shades.

Spend your normal sleep time (i.e., 6, 7, or 8 hours) in bed. If you are accustomed to sleeping eight hours a night, spending twelve hours getting that amount of sleep will only frustrate you and throw off your sleep cycle.

Regular exercise is helpful. Exercise allows better oxygen and blood flow, which helps you relax more and sleep better. If you exercise too close to bedtime or overdo it, that would be counterproductive.

A warm bath is a wonderful way to relax your body. You could also use ingredients such as bath salts, Epsom salts, baking soda, or bath oils to enhance your relaxation during a warm bath. These will relax you. They can also help remove toxins from your body.

Evaluate your medications (if you are taking any). Some medications or combinations of them can cause sleep disturbances. Your doctor could change the medication, dosage, or time you take it (if they believe it would help).

Massages could also aid in the transition to sleep. Have your spouse (or whoever) give you a massage just before going to sleep. Items such as foot or back massages could be bought from most stores. The following vitamins or supplements have been known to help. These include magnesium, nitrate, omega-3, resveratrol, zinc, and melatonin.

If you choose to use prescribed medications to help, be mindful of the risks involved. Ideally, medication should not be a first option. Medications can cause daytime drowsiness as well as create a dependence on the drug (source).

If your sleep difficulties persist, let your therapist know. You and your therapist may want to explore this with a more focused approach.