

## Healthy Sleep for a Healthy Brain

A typical adult needs about 7 to 8 hours of healthy sleep a night routinely. Less sleep may lead to problems with memory, clear thinking, and health problems with heart function, blood pressure, stroke risk, blood sugar-insulin control, weight gain, depression, and safety such as falling asleep while driving a car. Good sleep is important for a strong immune system, for example to fight off infection. The following tips may help improve sleep.

### Sleep Tips

**Tips for good sleep include a healthy lifestyle, treating a medical problem, keeping on a regular sleep routine, positive activities before bedtime, and a helpful setting for sleep.**

**A healthy daily lifestyle** should include good nutrition, drinking enough water, physical exercise, brain exercise, pleasant activities and interactions with others, having a sense of purpose, minimal negative stress, and good sleep.

**A medical check-up** and a sleep study may uncover a reason for sleep difficulties and treatment. Poor sleep affects about 40 million Americans and more women than men. Disorders such as breathing problems (i.e., sleep apnea), excess sleep, restless leg syndrome, depression, pain, or thyroid disease may lead to insomnia (inability to sleep, either to fall asleep, stay asleep or sleep well). For **sleep apnea** (breathing pauses or stops for too long before breathing again; heavy snoring may occur), **a physician may recommend using a CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) machine (and best design of mask).**

**A regular routine** should include going to bed and awakening at the same time, regular daily exercise (but not heavy exercise 3-4 hours before bedtime), relaxing activities 2-3 hours before bedtime, no naps or caffeine after 2 or 3PM, and limiting liquids a couple of hours before bedtime. A late snack before bedtime should be a small, light snack such as dairy products but not stimulants such as chocolate, regular coffee (or tea), tobacco, or foods heavy in fat or sugar.

**Positive activities to calm and relax before bedtime** may include activities such as yoga, a gentle massage, rocking on the back porch while watching the sunset, brushing and petting a favorite cat or dog; listen to relaxing music, tapes or CDs with sounds of nature such as ocean waves, gentle waterfalls or breezes, etc. Taking a shower or bath helps some people to relax and energizes others while soaking ones feet relaxes most people. Two - three hours before bedtime:

- Do not pay bills.
- Do not argue with anyone.
- Do not watch mind-stimulating programs such as TV mysteries, exciting movies, the news, etc.
- Do not work on the computer, iPad, or smartphone; the bright and flickering light increases your alertness and thinking. Dim light and darkness send messages to your eyes to release relaxing chemicals such as *melatonin* in your body.
- Do not eat in bed. Bed is for sleeping or "intimacy."
- Do not read exciting books in bed.

**A helpful setting** for sleep should include a comfortable bed, the bedroom temperature a bit cooler at night, and a quiet bedroom. Sleeping with a snoring or restless partner or pet in the same room (or bed) may interfere with restful sleep.

- Dim the lights a couple of hours before bedtime. A nightlight should be dim near the doorway to light the way to the bathroom and not directly in the bedroom.
- Turn the clock around to avoid seeing it. Checking the time often may increase the anxiety or stress about not falling asleep or staying asleep.

### **Challenges to Healthy Sleep**

If a person has been taking sleeping pills for a long time, stopping the pills may result in a period of withdrawal. Some people have “insomnia rebound”, a period of time when either difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep or both become worse. Following the sleep tips above for a few weeks should help the person to get over insomnia rebound and begin to sleep well.

If the insomnia is chronic, it may take a few (or several) weeks to train your body to sleep well. Adjust bedtime slowly 15 to 30 to 60 minutes each night over the course of a few (or several) weeks.

### **For Further Information**

1. National Sleep Foundation: Information on Sleep Health and Safety.  
[www.sleepfoundation.org/](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/)
2. PubMed Health - NCBI - NIH, (National Center for Biotechnology Information of the National Institutes of Health) - [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth)
  - a. Sleep Disorders - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMHT0023679/>
  - b. Relaxation techniques and sleep hygiene for insomnia – <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0072504/>
  - c. Insomnia - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMHT0023585/>

