

FEAP NEWSLETTER

A Series of Educational Articles from your Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

Getting the Sleep We Need

Rebecca Mason, RN, CS, CEAP
Faculty and Employee Assistance Counselor

Do you have trouble getting to sleep at night or wake up frequently? Do you feel exhausted in the morning? You may have insomnia, the most common sleep disorder. One in three adults experience some degree of insomnia at one time or another,



often due to stress. Sleepiness caused by insomnia causes a decrease in concentration, tiredness, and irritability and can lead to poor productivity or even automobile accidents. We all require different amounts of sleep, so insomnia is not related to how much sleep we get or how quickly we fall asleep but by the quality of sleep we get.

Many people have occasional insomnia that can be caused by

things such as medications, caffeine, noise, stress, worry or even a change in daily activities such as taking a vacation. Chronic insomnia can be due to medical or mental health problems or behavioral factors such as excessive drug or alcohol use, shift work, stress or even napping. Your physician can help you identify any factors that may be contributing to insomnia. If there is no specific condition causing the insomnia, behavioral strategies are the preferred treatments.

Improving sleep habits and your sleep environment is an important first step. The following tips may help improve quality of sleep.

-Unwind early in the evening. Strive for a period of calm for at least one hour before bed. This is not a time to roughhouse with the kids or watch a stimulating TV show.

-Develop a "sleep ritual" or routine, such as soft

music, a warm bath or cup of tea. Doing the same things each night before bed signals the body to settle down for the night.

-Make your bedroom primarily a place for sleeping or sex. It is not a good idea to use the bedroom to pay bills, work, watch TV or discuss family problems. Your body needs to recognize bed as a place for rest or intimacy only.

-Create a restful place to sleep. Sleep in a cool, dark room that is free from noise or disruption. A fan or "white noise" machine can help mask excess sound.



-Sleep on a comfortable and supportive mattress and foundation. Replace an older or uncomfortable mattress.

FEAP NEWSLETTER

A Series of Educational Articles from your Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

-Regular exercise can help but avoid exercise too close to bedtime as you may have trouble falling asleep.

-Do not nap. Napping during the day increases the chances that you will have trouble falling asleep



-Limit caffeine; too much during the day can make it hard to sleep. Remember that in addition to coffee and tea, some sodas and medications also contain caffeine.



-Reduce alcohol intake. Drinking alcohol too close to bedtime can disrupt normal sleep patterns and fragment sleep.

-Don't smoke. Nicotine is a stimulant and most smokers take longer to fall asleep and wake up more often during the night.

- Set a consistent wake up time that does not

change. Resist the urge to stay in bed longer to catch up on sleep. A consistent wake-up time will help reset your internal sleep-wake cycle and improve sleep.

-If you get up during the night, try and avoid bright light, which stimulates the body to wake up. Do expose yourself to bright light when you awaken in the morning to help regulate the body's biological clock.

-Get out of bed if you can't fall asleep within 20 or 30 minutes. Remember the "bed is only for sleep" rule. Return to bed only when sleepy. Lying awake for hours trying to sleep leads to anxiety and worry about not sleeping and causes the bed to become a place of anxiety and frustration. After 15-30 minutes of a quiet activity, see if you are sleepy enough to return to bed. This can help you to relearn a natural sleep pattern.

-Pay attention to your thinking about sleep. Believing a poor nights sleep is a disaster only generates more anxiety and worry. Reframe this thought to something more realistic such as "I'll be tired and maybe

cranky tomorrow, but nothing I can't handle".

-The more you try and control your sleep, the less you sleep. Sleep is a natural body process. You cannot force yourself to go to sleep; you can however do things that make it more likely you will fall asleep.

If you are having trouble sleeping, check with your physician to ensure there are no serious problems. If not, using some of these strategies may help you get the sleep you need.

**If you need help with this or other personal issues, please feel free to contact the FEAP:
(434) 243-2643
(800) 847-9355**

or you may contact one of the counselors directly:

**Rebecca Mason
(434) 924-0048**

**Kit Hennessy
(434) 243-9521**

**Mary Sherman
(434) 924-1727**

**Brenda Wilson
(434) 924-5483**

**Owen G. McKenzie
Program Manager
(434) 924-8140**