

BETTER SLEEP: WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY?

We know we can't live without food or oxygen, but we also can't live without sleep! During sleep, we go through many active processes that repair cells, fight infections, form new pathways for learning, and much more. Our bodies are made to sleep. Our **circadian rhythm**, or biological clock, naturally triggers us to sleep at night and stay awake during the day. Unfortunately, there's a lot that can mess with those clocks and/or get in the way of the right amount and quality of sleep. However, there's also much we can do with sleep hygiene to promote better sleep!

Sleep facts:

- The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends adults sleep **7 or more hours per night on a regular basis**. Quality matters too (example: sleep isn't broken up into chunks).
- Healthy sleep reduces the risk of accidents, mental health problems and chronic diseases, including but not excluding heart disease, stroke, weight gain, poor judgement, and forgetfulness.
- Sleep habits and issues can change throughout the lifespan.

What's getting in the way of sleep?

Sleep disorders. Insomnia, sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, and narcolepsy are common sleep disorders that affect millions of Americans. If you regularly take more than 30 minutes to fall asleep, wake up often during the night, need to take frequent naps, or feel overwhelming tired/fall asleep at inappropriate times during the day, talk to a health care provider.

Sex/gender. Females experience more sleep disorders than males and have more sleep-related complaints due to hormones and related symptoms during menstruation, pregnancy and menopause.

Lifestyle. Certain activities keep our bodies energized; others calm them down. Energizers like noise, light (especially blue light from devices), caffeine, large meals, physical activity, stress, alcohol and tobacco (especially when too close to bedtime) can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep at night.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

American Association of Sleep Medicine: www.sleepeducation.org
National Sleep Foundation: www.sleepfoundation.org



Achieving better sleep

Sleep environment. Keep your bedroom dark (darkness cues our brains to make melatonin – a sleepy hormone), cool, quiet, clean and peaceful. Sleep and sex only – keep everything else out.

Relaxation. Come up with a “wind down” routine to do every night before bed. Try yoga, deep breathing, mindfulness, writing.

Sleep-friendly lifestyle. Eat well and get plenty of physical activity and light exposure in the morning and afternoon. Limit or avoid tobacco and alcohol. And no more caffeine 6-8 hours from bedtime.

Keep a consistent schedule. Go to bed at night and wake up in the morning around the same times every day (including weekends). *Naps can help with sleepiness, but they don't make up for a poor night's sleep.*

Reach out to a professional as needed. Sleep specialists can diagnose a sleeping disorder or help you make changes to your sleeping habits. Speak with a healthcare provider before taking any sort of sleep medication.

