Give yourself a gift: regular, restful, restorative sleep

A good night’s sleep is something we all aspire to, but many of us fall short. According to a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study, more than one third of U.S. adults are not getting enough sleep on a regular basis.

Sleep keeps the mind and body healthy

The relationship between sleep and overall physical health is well-documented. Sleep allows both the body and brain to recover during the night. A good night’s rest ensures you’ll feel refreshed and alert when you wake up in the morning.

How much sleep do you really need?

Most adults need at least seven or more hours of good-quality sleep on a regular schedule each night. Getting enough sleep isn’t only about total hours slept. It’s also important to get good, quality sleep, so you’ll feel rested when you wake up. Falling asleep during the day is a likely sign you aren’t getting adequate sleep at night.

A “sleep deficiency” occurs if you regularly experience one or more of the following:

- You don’t get enough sleep (called sleep deprivation)
- You fall asleep at the wrong time of day (you’re out of sync with your body’s natural clock)
- You don’t sleep well or you miss the restorative levels of sleep (REM sleep, deep sleep, etc.) your body needs
- You have a sleep disorder that prevents you from getting enough sleep or results in poor quality sleep

Sleep deficiency increases the risk for a wide range of diseases and other health problems. This includes obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke. Lack of sleep also poses a threat to physical safety (drowsy drivers cause thousands of traffic accidents every year).

If you need support in creating healthy sleep habits, please call Advocate Aurora EAP at 800-236-3231.

What about Melatonin?

Melatonin is a hormone that helps regulate a person’s sleep cycle. At the proper dose, melatonin is generally considered safe. Always follow the instructions. If you take other medications or have other health conditions, check with your health care provider before using melatonin or any supplement.

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Healthy sleep hygiene habits

Sleep hygiene means the habits that can help you have a good night’s sleep. Here are some sleep hygiene habits from Headspace.com:

Set a consistent sleep-wake schedule

This means going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, give or take 20 minutes, including weekends.

Create a relaxing bedtime/pre-bedtime routine

Focus on calming activities you enjoy — reading a book, meditation, deep breathing, drinking caffeine-free tea, etc. When you’re stressed or anxious, your body produces more cortisol, the stress hormone. The higher the cortisol, the more awake you feel and the less likely you are to sleep.

Dim the lights after dark

Bright light from lamps and electronics at night can mess with your sleep-wake cycle, making it harder to fall asleep.

Unplug from electronics

You’ve probably heard it before: screens and sleep are incompatible. Keeping screen use to a minimum at least an hour before bed, is essential for sound sleep. The blue light from your laptop or cell phone interferes with the release of melatonin, a hormone that tells your body it’s time to wind down.

Keep your room cool and comfortable

Anything below 54°F or higher than 75°F might disrupt your slumber.

Get regular exercise

Exercise helps by promoting melatonin production. Thirty minutes of moderate aerobic exercise during the day may improve your sleep quality that same night. Avoid exercising too close to bedtime.

Other tips to improve sleep hygiene:
- stop watching the clock at night when trying to fall asleep
- avoid daytime naps
- eat and hydrate enough - but not too much or too close to bedtime
- avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and other chemicals that interfere with sleep

Give yourself the gift of sleep

Getting enough sleep should always be a top priority. Try the tips offered in this newsletter. If you still have trouble sleeping — or if you often feel tired after sleeping — please consult with your health care provider.

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