

Boy, I Sure Could Use Some Sleep!

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One of the most basic and common complaints I hear from people is that they are not sleeping well. A good night's rest can be difficult due to stress, depression, frustration, anger, worry, work schedules or life style. I often, hear from parents of teenagers about their concern over the sleep patterns and habits of their son or daughter. Here are some basic tips to help you sleep from the "Rules of Sleep Hygiene"*

1. Sleep as much as needed to feel refreshed during the following day. Restricting the time in bed seems to solidify sleep, but excessively long times in bed seem related to fragmented and shallow sleep.
2. Get up at the same time each day, 7 days a week. (A regular wake time in the morning leads to regular times of sleep onset.)
3. A steady daily amount of exercise probably deepens sleep.
4. Insulate your bedroom against sounds (carpeting, insulated curtains, and closing the door).
5. Excessively warm rooms may disturb sleep; keep the room temperature moderate.
6. Hunger may disturb sleep. A light snack at bedtime may help sleep.
7. Try to avoid excessive liquids in the evening, in order to minimize the need for nighttime trips to the bathroom.
8. Avoid caffeine-containing beverages in the evening.
9. Avoid alcohol in the evening. Although alcohol helps tense people fall asleep more easily, the ensuing sleep is then broken up.
10. People who feel angry and frustrated because they cannot sleep should not try harder and harder to fall asleep but should turn on the light, leave the bedroom, and do something different like reading a boring book. Don't engage in stimulating activity. Return to bed only when sleepy. Get up at your regular time the next day, no matter how little you slept.
11. The chronic use of tobacco disturbs sleep.
12. If you find yourself waking up and looking at the clock, put the clock under the bed or cover it up.

In addition to these suggestions, some people find "white" noise (rain storm, flowing stream, etc.) from a sound machine to be helpful. Also, some simple relaxation techniques of slowing your breathing and breathing full (but not deep) breaths and pausing a second at the end of a full exhalation can also help you prepare for sleep.

Sleep tight!!!

*Reynolds, C.F. and Kupfer, D.J.: Sleep Disorders, in American Psychiatric Press Textbook of Psychiatry. Edited by Talbot, Hales and Ydofsky, Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Press, 1988, pp 737-752.

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