

The Power of Sleep

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I spent a very restless night this week and thought I probably wasn't the only one. We all have trouble sleeping from time to time, but when insomnia persists day after day, it can become a real problem. Sleep impacts our health: helping the brain function, supporting our immunity and even protecting against heart disease.

So What Causes Sleep Issues?

Poor Sleep Habits. An irregular bedtime, frequent naps, late-night activities, or weekend sleeping-in can scramble your body's normal sleep/wake schedules.



Emotional Stress. Emotional stress accounts for more than 50% of chronic sleep problems.

Physical Illness.

Diet and Exercise Habits. Alcohol or caffeine near bedtime can have negative effects on one's sleeping patterns. A large meal or strenuous exercise close to bedtime can temporarily boost the body's metabolism, chasing away sleep.

Before turning to other options, try some of these tips to help you get a better night's sleep.

1. Exercise

Exercise boosts the effect of natural sleep hormones such as melatonin, Dr. Karen Carlson, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, says. Carlson says a morning workout is ideal. Exposing yourself to bright daylight first thing in the morning will help the natural circadian rhythm.

2. Ambience Matters

Noise, light, excessive heat or cold, drafts, air that's too humid or too dry, all can prevent sleep.

3. Start a sleep ritual

Just like routine was so important to your child's evening sleep habits, the same goes for adults. "Rituals help signal the body and mind that it's coming to be time for sleep," explains Dr. Carlson. Drink a glass of warm milk, take a bath, listen to calming music or read a book for pleasure to unwind before. Avoid television or your phone.

4. De-stress

Worries can manifest when you are finally trying to rest. This stress is a stimulus that fights your efforts to sleep. Before winding down, deal with these worries first. Try writing out concerns and what actions can be taken. Plan a little bit for the next day.

Then start relaxing, try some deep breathing exercises.

5. Try and Then Take a Break

Rather than trying harder and harder to fall asleep during a poor night, turn on the light and try doing something else for a while. This can decrease frustration and tension about being unable to sleep.

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