

Sleep Hygiene

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Sleep, which occupies 1/3 of our lives, is a very underrated commodity.

The average adult requires 7-9 hours sleep per day. Getting less than this requirement may cause significant symptoms, both physical ie. blood pressure, diabetes and psychological ie. depression, cognitive impairment, and daytime sleepiness.

At present it is estimated that about 1/3 of road traffic accidents are due in part to sleepiness and these accidents tend to be more serious and more often fatal.

It is therefore very important that we make better provision for sleep.

- ❖ Try to ensure as regular bedtime hours as possible.
- ❖ The bedroom should be a place of rest, not of activity, ie. no T.V., video games, computers etc.
- ❖ As far as possible internal and external lighting and noise kept to a minimum.
- ❖ The bed should be comfortable (mattresses do not last forever!) and the room well ventilated and not overheated.
- ❖ The evening meal should be taken at least 3 hours before retiring.
- ❖ Avoid rigorous exercise or hot baths prior to sleep. (We sleep better if our body temperature drops slightly at bedtime.)
- ❖ Avoid caffeinated drinks later in the evening or to excess during the day. (Tea, coffee, cola drinks / “energy” drinks)
- ❖ Alcohol – although initially alcohol makes us drowsy, it can significantly interfere with sleep later in the night. (The products of alcohol can actually be a stimulant.)

Tips for Insomniacs

- ❖ Observe good sleep hygiene as detailed above.
- ❖ If you wake, do not turn light on (light = daytime as far as the brain is concerned).
- ❖ Do not get up and do active things. Try to remain as inactive and unstimulated as possible.
- ❖ If you tend to wake and lie turning over worries, try to list your major and minor concerns on paper before going to bed, listing any action that you can take. This may help later in the night, as the problems will have been addressed. (Of course it is accepted that we cannot solve all life's problems by such a simple technique but it is worth trying.)
- ❖ Do not drink coffee, tea or caffeinated drinks during the evening or at night.

- ❖ Remember tobacco is a stimulant.
- ❖ A milky malted drink (not chocolate) at bedtime, can be helpful.
- ❖ Use modern sleeping tablets (under prescription from your GP) for short periods to 'reset' the sleep pattern.

Tips for Snorers

- ❖ Snorers are usually better lying on their side with the chin tipped slightly up. (Think of the recovery position as demonstrated in First-Aid courses). The use of pillows or 'devices' (a tennis ball sewn into the back of a tee-shirt) may help this.
- ❖ Devices to reduce nasal obstruction may help. (Breathright adhesive strips, Snorestop or Nasovent nasal inserts)
- ❖ Adequate management of nasal blockage due to Rhinitis or hayfever.
- ❖ Weight – Excessive weight is the single most important factor in snoring. Achieving your ideal weight is highly likely to be helpful.
- ❖ Alcohol – This acts as a muscle relaxant making the upper airway more floppy, causing snoring.