Sleep Better, Feel Better

Do you wake up each morning without the aid of an alarm clock feeling refreshed and energetic? If not, you could be one of the many people that have problems falling asleep or staying asleep.

While the amount of sleep it takes to feel rejuvenated varies from person to person, experts say we need about 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep.

Sleep is crucial to maintaining good health. Without it, you increase your susceptibility to a variety of health problems including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and depression. Getting enough sleep at night or adding naps in the afternoon when needed can help prevent serious accidents due to sleepiness. Lack of sleep also affects our concentration and makes us more irritable.

Below are some suggestions for getting a better sleep. However, if you suspect you might have a sleep disorder, such as insomnia or sleep apnea, or your sleep is disrupted by symptoms of a medical illness or depression, you should see a physician.

Go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time each day – including weekends.

- **Avoid caffeine.** For some people it can cause sleep problems for up to 12 hours.
- **Avoid bright light around the house before bed.** In the morning open the shades or go outside to get some sunlight. If this is not possible, turn on lights to make the environment bright.
- **Don't stress if you wake up in the middle of the night.** It can just make matters worse. Breathe slowly and deeply and relax your muscles.
- **Don't toss and turn for longer than half an hour.** Get up and do something calming such as reading.
- **Avoid exercise before bedtime,** although regular exercise during the day can help you sleep better.
- **Have a light snack, but avoid a heavy meal before bedtime.** A hot milky drink is always a good idea as milk contains tryptophan, which the body converts into serotonin – a natural hormone that makes you sleepy.
- **Avoid alcohol.** It may help you get to sleep but it will cause you to wake up throughout the night.
- **Turn off the computer an hour or so before bed as it stimulates your brain.**
- **Develop a relaxing bedtime routine.** This may include a warm bath, relaxation exercises, listening to soft music, or some quiet reading (use a small wattage bulb to read by as bright light can inhibit sleep).

If you have difficulty falling or staying asleep, the problem may be your bedroom environment. Maybe this is the time to make a change and makeover your bedroom into a restful, relaxing haven guaranteed to help you sleep better. To do that, here are some suggestions.

- **Remove the TV.** Even if you don't fall asleep watching it, you are unconsciously associating another activity with the area you use to sleep.
- **Buy a new bed.** If your bed is more than 10 years old, consider replacing it. Its structure may have deteriorated up to 75 per cent, causing sleep disruption and potential damage to the spine. Research shows a new bed is more effective than sleeping pills and can improve a night's sleep by 42 minutes.
- **Place the mattress on a slatted base.** Sleep experts say this allows greater circulation of air to reach the mattress, which in turn can help to reduce sweating during the night, aiding uninterrupted sleep.
- **Change your pillow.** If you wake up with a cramp in your back or a sore neck, you might want to experiment with different pillows – try feather, synthetic, water, or special pillows for side, back or stomach sleepers.
- **Keep your room dark during sleep hours.** Use heavy shades or an eye mask to keep light out, so street or early morning light does not signal the body's internal clock that it's time to get up.
- **Experiment with finding the right room temperature.** Most people sleep better in a slightly cooler room. Make sure you have adequate ventilation.

- **Keep the bedroom as tidy as possible so it feels more peaceful.**