

SLEEP HEALTH

Sleep is needed for good health. Sleep can be disrupted when people experience stress, pain or other medical conditions. People can have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or be unable to return to sleep if they wake too early. They may also have a sleep disorder, such as sleep apnea, which should be evaluated by a physician specializing in sleep medicine. The body needs sleep to naturally restore the immune, nervous, skeletal, and muscular systems. Good sleep also promotes positive mood, memory and clear thinking. You can support your body's natural ability to get healthy sleep by following the guidelines below:

- **Stick to a consistent sleep schedule.** Go to bed and wake at the same time each day.
- **Make your bedroom supportive to sleep.** Your bedroom should be cool and dark and as free as possible from sounds that might disturb or wake you.
- **Your mattress and pillows should be comfortable.** A mattress will typically last 9 or 10 years before needing to be replaced.
- **Practice a calming bedtime routine.** A calming routine helps your nervous system relax and prepare for sleep. Examples include listening to relaxing music or practicing a guided relaxation exercise, doing simple stretching exercises or taking a warm bath. Find what works for you and be consistent.
- **Avoid bright lights and electronic devices before bed.** Bright light and electronic screen light suppresses melatonin production. This can lead to increased alertness and prevent the brain from winding down in preparation for sleep.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise promotes health and contributes to longer and more restful sleep. For some people, exercising too close to bedtime can make it difficult to fall asleep. If this is the case for you, exercise in the morning or early afternoon.
- **Avoid caffeine during the 6 hours prior to bed.** Caffeine blocks the body's natural ability to relax, rest and sleep.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes and heavy meals in the evening.** Alcohol and cigarettes disrupt sleep while eating a big meal can cause indigestion that also makes it hard to sleep.
- **A bedtime snack can promote sleep.** The best bedtime snack to support sleepiness contains both protein and carbohydrate, such as cereal with milk.
- **If you have problems sleeping, avoid naps.**
- **Calm your mind with calming thoughts.** At bedtime or should you wake, repeat calming phrases while breathing deeply as an alternative to thinking about your worries. An example is: "May I be peaceful. May I be safe. May I be at ease."
- **Put your stress to rest.** Imagine hanging your stressors in a hall closet or placing them in a helium balloon and letting them float away for the night.

If you're still having trouble sleeping, don't hesitate to speak with your doctor or to find a sleep professional. You may also benefit from recording your sleep in a Sleep Diary to help you better evaluate common patterns or issues you may see with your sleep or sleeping habits.