

SLEEP

Sleeping is a natural part of life, but lack of sleep (insomnia) can be very distressing. Outward signs of lack of sleep include tiredness and fatigue during the day with a tendency to want to sleep in the afternoons, whilst the not so obvious signs of sleep deprivation include depression, muscle irritability and tightness and reduced immunity against disease.

There are a number of different types of insomnia, including difficulty getting off to sleep (sleep onset insomnia), early morning waking, poor quality or light sleeping, pain related insomnia, and worry insomnia. There are different strategies to help different types of sleeplessness. Below are a few helpful hints.

Before going to bed:

1. Try to avoid drugs or foods that stimulate the mind within a few hours of going to bed. In particular this means cutting out coffee, strong tea or chocolate after mid-afternoon. Medications that may cause stimulation of the brain include pseudoephedrine used in cough medicines and lozenges and some dieting pills also contain stimulants.
2. Don't drink alcohol for 2-3 hours before going to bed: it interferes with normal sleep and causes you to wake during the night and have difficulty getting back to sleep.
3. Night time worrying is one of the most significant causes of insomnia. Learn to reduce thinking and worrying in bed. Avoid using the time in bed to think about things you have to do the next day. Make a list of things to do before you get into bed.
4. Set aside worrying time and planning time during daylight hours.
5. Try and avoid stimulating activities within 1 to 2 hours of going to bed. Aim to do something calming and relaxing for half an hour before bed.

When you get into bed:

6. Lie down to go to sleep only when you are actually sleepy. Sleepiness generally comes in waves every 90 minutes. For some people this means that you will have to force yourself to stay up a lot later than usual, and certainly at least until 10.00 or 11.00 pm.
7. Try positive visualisation when in bed. Imagine the room is a favourite place such as a tranquil beach. Slow down your thought processes by talking to yourself in a slow monotone voice (in side your head).

Comprehensive spinal and joint care

8. Do not use your bed for anything except sleeping. Do not read, watch TV, listen to the radio or eat in bed. However, if you believe that reading or some other activity helps you to fall asleep, feel free to break this rule, but do it for no longer than about 30 minutes.
9. If you do not fall asleep within about 30 minutes of turning out the light, get up, go to another room and do something that is not too arousing (for example, read a magazine, watch TV or do some ironing) and stay up until you feel the next wave of sleepiness come on and then return to your bedroom to sleep. The goal is to associate your bed with falling asleep quickly.
10. If you return to bed and still can't sleep, repeat the previous rule, and do this as often as is necessary until you fall asleep in about 30 minutes.
11. Remember that even if you can't sleep there is some benefit in lying in bed resting. Remember most people wake up once or twice a night – it's normal.
12. If you wake up at night thinking about things you have to do the next day, then keep a pen and paper beside the bed and write down those items so you don't have to try and remember them all night.

The next morning:

13. Get up at about the same time every morning, 7 days a week, regardless of how long you have slept. This will help your body to develop a consistent sleep rhythm. If you like to sleep in later on weekends, do so for not more than 1 hour later than you would on the normal weekdays.
14. Do not nap during the day. Even a 5 minute nap in front of the TV can take the edge off your sleepiness and can make it harder for you to sleep well that night.
15. Do some form of relaxation each day. You may like to use a relaxation tape, do yoga, meditate or just take quiet time, whatever your prefer. The ideal is to do relaxation twice a day for 20 minutes (for instance, once in the middle of the day and once just before bed, or in bed). With any method of relaxation training you will need to practice relaxation daily for at least 4 weeks to obtain maximum benefit.
16. Exercise regularly during the day and it helps to make you feel more tired. However avoid very strenuous or adrenaline producing exercise within 3 hours of going to bed.
17. If you have difficulties doing any of the above, or want more information, we recommend the "Sleep Better Without Drugs" program which is available either to purchase or to rent from the front desk.