

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Sleep: Do You Get Enough?

Most of us will suffer from insomnia or other sleep disorders at some point during our lives. We often take broken sleep for granted, and accept the resulting higher stress, shortened temper, lower motivation and slower reflexes as part of a normal day.

In actuality, however, a good night's sleep isn't just a restful interlude that's nice to have. Rather, it’s absolutely essential to good health, effective functioning and safety. The consequences of poor sleep include impaired performance, decreased productivity, emotional problems, and increased mistakes and accidents. Let's take a look at your sleep habits and see whether they can be improved.

Healthy Sleep

Sleep problems can sometimes be associated with physical or mental conditions, or with certain medications. Consider visiting your doctor for a check-up as a sensible first step.

Eight hours of sleep a night is optimum for most healthy adults. Some people can function well on less, and others need more. If you typically feel refreshed, alert and ready to take on each day, you are probably getting sufficient sleep.

Sleep Barriers

- Some common ailments that may disrupt sleep patterns include:
- Short-term stress
- Depression
- Changed sleep routines resulting from shift work, jet lag or frequent late nights
- Alcohol and caffeine
- An uncomfortable sleep setting that is too hot, cold or too noisy
- A restless partner
- Pain or physical discomfort
- Menopause
- Old age

Encouraging Healthy Sleep

If you or someone you know is suffering from sleep disturbances, here are some suggestions on how to ensure a more restful night:

- **Keep regular hours.** Try to go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning.

- **Exercise regularly.** People who get plenty of exercise tend to sleep better. Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

- **Cut down on stimulants.** Consuming stimulants, such as caffeine or colas, in the evening can interfere with your ability to fall asleep and prevents deep sleep.

- **Drink only in moderation.** Alcohol interrupts the sleep stages and results in fragmented sleep.

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- **Unwind early in the evening.** Try to deal with worries and distractions at least an hour before going to sleep.
- **Develop a bedtime ritual.** Make the transition from wakefulness to sleep by doing the same things each night before going to bed. For example, take a bath, drink a mug of hot milk or chamomile tea, or take the dog for a short walk.
- **Create a restful sleep environment.** Sleep in a cool, quiet, dark room on a comfortable mattress.
- **Keep stress-related things out of the bedroom.** Avoid reading work materials in bed. Don't have an office desk in plain view in the bedroom.

If you suffer from irregular sleeping patterns, you may be discouraged from restless nights. Fortunately, solutions are available. Be sure to discuss the issue with your doctor; he or she will be able to suggest a method of treatment best suited to your concerns.