

Improving Sleep

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is Restorative Sleep?

Most adults require 7-9 hours of sleep a night with at least 6 hours of continuous sleep. Deep (REM) sleep is responsible for consolidating newly learned information and occurs after 6 hours of continuous sleep.

Why Do We Need Sleep?

Restorative sleep supports:

- Normal appetite drives
- Healthy metabolism
- Flushes inflammation from the brain
- Regulates the immune system
- Converts short term memory to long term memory

Guidelines for Good Sleep Hygiene

1) Have a regular bedtime routine and stick to it. Trying to catch up on sleep by sleeping late disturbs this rhythm.

2) Follow a Wake/Sleep Circadian Rhythm. Light regulates the natural circadian rhythm. Daylight during the day (20-60 min) and low lighting at night (<60 watts or < 200 lux from screens) supports this normal rhythm.

3) Go to bed when you're tired and likely to fall asleep. Normal sleep onset is 15-20 minutes.

4) Relax before bed. Create 10-15 minutes of relaxing bedtime rituals like reading, a warm shower, herbal tea, gentle stretching, meditation etc. Focus on positive thoughts. Positivity shuts down stress allowing a deeper sleep.

5) Create an ideal sleep environment with adequate space, quiet, and temperature.

6) Avoid working in the bedroom. Use the bedroom only for pleasure and sleep.

7) Try to sleep only at night and if you must nap, don't take a nap after 3 pm

8) Decrease alcohol, nicotine, caffeine consumption and large meals particularly before bed.

9) Exercise during the day but not within 2 hours of bedtime.

10) Complete any planning two to three hours prior to bedtime and avoid stress activating thoughts. Set aside some "worry time" each day to write down issues that may be bothering you and then leave them behind or write down your To Do list and revisit it the next day.

11) If you are unable to fall asleep or wake prematurely, don't lie in bed thinking. If you can't fall asleep within 20-30 minutes, get up and engage in a relaxing activity.

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How to Get More Sleep

You may not be getting enough sleep if

- you fall asleep within minutes of going to bed
- doze off during the day when not fully engaged
- have mood changes
- physical symptoms
- feel fatigued

Try to increase sleep time by going to bed 10-15 minutes earlier until you reach your goal bedtime. Sleep is a body habit. It may take a few weeks to readjust.

Contact a provider if your sleep difficulties do not improve after implementing good sleep hygiene. Your provider may advise Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, prescribe sleeping medication or refer you to a sleep specialist. Talk to your provider if significant snoring is a problem and you are concerned about sleep apnea.

Resourceful Websites: sleepfoundation.org and mayoclinic.org

For more information please visit BWell Health Promotion website at

www.brown.edu/bwell