

# The Importance of Sleep

*Problems with your sleep can have a huge impact on your state of mind and your overall health. Whether you have disrupted or inconsistent sleep, or you get too much or too little sleep, it can be connected with larger or additional problems, such as an undiagnosed medical condition, symptoms of depression or anxiety, or problems in your work, relationship or family life. Want to improve your mood and sense of well-being? Make sure you know all you can about your sleep needs, and that you are doing all you can to make sure you get adequate sleep.*

Do you have a sleep problem? Keep a log for a week and see if you get 6-8 hours a day, at a consistent time, with a feeling of being refreshed and rested on waking.

Have you had any significant changes recently? Sleep problems can be triggered by physiological or medical changes, stress, routine, environment or work changes, or relationship or mood changes.

If you think your sleep disruption may have to do with your physical health, see your physician.

Learn about how sleep problems impacts your body and mind, thoughts and feelings.

Nourish your health to keep it:

- Get adequate sleep, usually at least six to eight hours per day at a consistent time each day.
- Eat a balanced, steady diet: usually three balanced meals and three snacks a day, and plenty of water, lead to a more positive mental attitude. Make sure you do not eat or drink a lot of fluids before bed.
- Get regular exercise, working toward 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three times per week—every day if possible!—to improve sleep, mood and outlook. Make sure you do not exercise before bed.
- Cut down on caffeine: caffeine interferes with sleep & can stimulate negative feelings & sensations.
- Eliminate substance & alcohol use: even a small amount used regularly can disrupt your sleep cycle.
- Stop smoking: smoking can increase irritability and mood instability, and disrupt sleep.

Consider these tools for better sleep:

- Establish a regular time for going to bed and a consistent time for getting up.
- Do not go to bed too early.
- Discover how much sleep you actually need for optimal functioning.
- Develop rituals which signal the end of the day and time for bed.
- Keep your bed for sleeping and sex only.
- Avoid physical or mental stimulation before going to bed.
- Be careful of naps.

Learn relaxation tools and techniques: they can be as simple as breathing exercises, warm baths or milk and listening to peaceful music, or as complicated as yoga classes, meditation practice, progressive relaxation exercises, etc. A simple exercise:

Use slow, deep breaths. Feet on the floor, sitting up straight, count slowly to four as you breathe in through your nose. Breathe deeply into your belly. Then exhale even more slowly through your nose, counting to six or eight. Continue to breathe slowly & deeply, counting each breath for a few minutes, being sure to loosen the muscles in your torso, shoulders, neck, belly with each breath.

And make sure you do not obsess about your sleep! Relax, relax, relax.