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FAMILY PRACTICE PHYSICIAN

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Sleep Hygiene

1. Adopt a routine schedule: Try to maintain a regular, routine sleep/wake schedule. That is, go to bed at the same time every night and awaken at the same time each morning no matter how sleepy you are. This may cause some difficulties the first few nights, but eventually your body will get used to maintaining the same schedule. Do not vary your weekend schedule by more than one hour from your weekday schedule.
2. Avoid taking daytime naps: People who nap have more difficulty falling asleep at night time. If you can skip your nap, you will find that you will be able to not only fall asleep faster, but will be able to better maintain your sleep during the nighttime.
3. Avoid caffeine and alcohol: Caffeine is a brain stimulant that interferes with good sleep. Alcohol may seem to initially help you fall asleep more rapidly, however it causes early morning awakenings and difficulty returning to sleep. They are also both diuretics that may cause an urge to urinate in the middle of the night.
4. Use the bedroom for what it is meant to be used for: Do not get into the habit of watching TV, eating, or performing any other activities in your bed. You want to train your brain into thinking that once you are in bed it is time to go to sleep. If you routinely engage in other activities in bed, your brain will be more difficult to shut down at bedtime as well. Do not use your bed for anything other than sleep and sexual intimacy.
5. Avoid bedtime high carb snacking: Avoid sugar or carbohydrates within two hours of sleep. If you are hungry, eat small portions of foods that promote sleep such as one glass of warm milk, turkey, or nuts.
6. Avoid nighttime fluids: Drinking fluids three hours prior to sleep causes an urge to urinate in the middle of the night. Try to drink fluids in the first half of the day, instead of the evening.
7. Get regular exercise: Routine exercise releases endorphins that decrease stress. This in turn increases deep sleep. Get at least sixty minutes of cardiovascular exercise daily, such as walking, running, or biking. Try to avoid doing this in the evenings, however, as the endorphins can cause brain stimulation if performed within three hours of sleep.
8. If you can not fall asleep: If you are unable to fall asleep within thirty minutes, get up and do something relaxing, such as light reading or taking a warm bath. Then go back to bed once you feel sleepy. Don't lie awake in bed for hours on end. This goes along with #4 - the bed is meant for sleep. if you're not sleeping, get out of bed. Try to limit the amount of time you are in bed not sleeping.