

SLEEP

Is sleep important? How much is enough and what happens if we don't get it?

Why is Sleep Important?

- Sleep is essential to rest the body and mind. Also, our body carries out important functions like healing and growing while we sleep.
- If we don't get enough sleep we may have a lack of concentration, problems with digestion, poor immunity, headaches, irritability and increased pain.
- Continual lack of sleep causes significant problems such as increased risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and even personality changes. We also age faster!

How Much Sleep Do We Need?

- The amount of sleep we need depends on our age. School age children need 9-11 hours, teenagers need 8-10 hours and adults need 7-9 hours.

What is Disturbed Sleep?

- Some people have difficulty getting to sleep, some people have difficulty staying asleep and some people wake very early and can't get back to sleep – all are considered to have disturbed sleep.

What Causes Disturbed Sleep?

- Disturbed sleep can be caused by many things: too much caffeine or alcohol, smoking, eating just before going to bed or illness.
- Blue light – such as that given off by TV screens, computers and mobile phones – is a “wake up light” and can delay sleep.
- Emotions such as stress, anger and grief can disturb sleep or cause nightmares.

What About People Working at Night?

- A huge number of people work at night: medical staff, and emergency services are well known but there are also people working in hospitality, retail, public transport and many more.
- Our bodies are built to sleep during the night not during the day so many of these people have disturbed sleep and carry chronic sleep deficits.

Can Sleep Deficits be “Caught Up”?

- Short term deficits – like a couple of late nights – can be caught up by having a longer sleep.
- Chronic deficits cannot be caught up by the occasional sleep in and will cause health issues.

What can We do to Improve our Sleep?

- Finish eating and exercising several hours before going to bed. Limit your consumption of caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes especially 2-3 hours before bed.
- An hour before bed:
 - Switch off “blue light” devices
 - Avoid doing things that are going to make you mentally alert bed such as study, crossword puzzles or writing emails.
 - Do something relaxing – read, listen to quiet music, do a jigsaw puzzle, meditate.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark and cool. Try to stop outside light illuminating the room.
- Have a bedtime routine – shower, read, cup of camomile tea – it “primes” the body for sleep.
- Acupuncture great to help re-establish a healthy sleep pattern.