

SLEEPING Rx.

“Prescription for Keeping Your Sleeping on Track”

Here are some ideas you will find very useful to consider.

1. Going to bed and rising at regular times, seven days a week, strengthens circadian rhythm and leads to improved sleep and alertness.
2. Correct use of light and dark reinforces your sleep schedule. Get as much outside light in the morning and during the day as possible. Ensure your room is dark at night.
3. Although an excessively warm room disturbs sleep, there is no evidence an excessively cold room helps sleep. A quiet room with a temperature of about 18C is ideal.
4. Hunger may disturb sleep; however do not eat a large meal just before going to bed. The older you are, the more important it is to avoid having dinner as the largest meal of the day. You will need less sleep as you get older.
5. Caffeine (tea, coffee, soft-drinks), alcohol, chocolate, nicotine and spicy foods will fragment sleep and increase reflux which disturbs sleep and may result in heartburn type symptoms during the night.
6. An occasional sleeping pill may be of benefit, but chronic use is ineffective and over the long term will disturb sleep further.
7. Alcohol may help tense people relax and therefore fall asleep more easily, but the ensuing sleep is then fragmented. Warm full-cream milk helps onset of sleep.
8. People who feel frustrated because they cannot sleep should not try harder to fall asleep but should get out of bed after 15 minutes, do something boring until tired, then try again. However, it is still important to still get up at your regular rising time.
9. Keep bedroom for sleeping and sex, not for watching television or computer work.
10. Watching the clock may increase anxiety of sleeplessness and further disturb sleep. Put the clock on the floor so you don't watch it, but that you can still hear the alarm.
11. A regular daily amount of exercise early in the day, or late afternoon or early evening deepens sleep; occasional exercise does not necessarily improve sleep. Strenuous exercise just before bed may disturb sleep.
12. The use of tobacco disturbs sleep due to the impact of nicotine and coughing.
13. A poor mattress, pillow or bed results in discomfort, tossing and turning.
14. Some medications disturb sleep; check with your GP for possible sleep side effects.
15. Writing down things that need to be done the next day earlier in the evening will clear your mind. Set aside some 'worry time' during the day if necessary.
16. A 60 to 90 minute period before bedtime to relax helps sleep onset. Do a quiet, relaxing activity, such as stretching, listening to soothing music, taking a warm bath/shower or reading a book. Use relaxation techniques during the day and to help you fall asleep e.g., meditation, deep breathing, visualisations.
17. Avoid daytime napping.
18. Dwelling a lot on your sleep patterns can contribute to sleep problems. Trust that your body will demand the sleep it needs, and try not to worry about sleep loss.
19. When sleep is chronically disturbed, the cause needs to be explored. Your GP (who can also refer you to a sleep physician) is a good person to consult if the above suggestions do not help.