

# Sleep Hygiene

Due to a variety of factors, many people do not sleep as well as they should. Sleep problems are much more common than is generally realized—many sleep disorders go undiagnosed and untreated, in part because sleep disorder sufferers often do not recognize their symptoms, or do not associate their symptoms with problems in sleeping.

Fortunately, most sleep problems can be effectively and easily treated, often by adjustments in everyday behaviors. Let's look at some of the factors that contribute to poor sleep, and explain what you can do if you recognize these factors as challenges to your healthy sleep experience.

## Lifestyle Factors

- Exercise—As healthful and necessary as exercise is, you should avoid exercising within two hours of going to sleep. You'll find that exercising between four and six hours before bedtime will help you sleep more restfully.
- Alcohol and caffeine—Consuming either alcohol or caffeine within four to six hours of bedtime can disrupt your sleep. Try to avoid drinks and medications containing either alcohol or caffeine in the hours before sleeping.
- Tobacco—Nicotine is a stimulant. Smoking or chewing tobacco before bedtime can affect sleep.
- Food and drink—Eating heavy or spicy foods or consuming liquids close to bedtime may produce sleep disruption. Conversely, a light snack before bed, especially foods containing the natural substance tryptophan—found in turkey, bananas, and dairy products, among other foods—can help some people fall sleep more readily.
- Medications—Many over-the-counter and prescription drugs have the potential to affect sleep. If you have changed medications recently and are experiencing difficulty sleeping, discuss this with your physician.

## Environmental Factors

Changes to your sleeping surroundings can result in difficulty sleeping. If you are having trouble sleeping, consider whether some change in your environment may be responsible. If any of the following is a factor, try these suggestions.

- Noise can be reduced using earplugs or a white noise machine.
- Sunlight or bright street lights can be eliminated with heavy curtains shielding windows.
- Also consider whether some activity on the part of your sleeping partner, children, or pets may be disturbing your sleep.
- Cool temperature
- No TV or computers

## Medical factors

A broad spectrum of common medical conditions can have an impact on healthy sleep. Talk with your doctor if you suspect that your sleep may be compromised by any of these conditions:

- Depression
- Acid reflux disease
- Pain, whether chronic or sudden
- Snoring (can be a sign of obstructive sleep apnea, a potentially serious sleep disorder)
- Asthma
- Heart disease
- Hormonal changes— from menstrual cycle, pregnancy, menopause

Remember, most sleep problems have a solution. If you feel as though you are not sleeping as restfully as you should, discuss your concerns with your doctor. With his or her help, you can find the pathway to more satisfying sleep.