

## Women Need Sleep

Sixty percent of American women say they don't get enough sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation's *2007 Sleep in America* poll released March 6, 2007. This latest NSF survey included 1,003 women age 18 to 64.

### How to Get a Good Night's Sleep

You may have a sleep problem if you have trouble falling asleep, wake up too often, or don't feel rested upon waking. These tips can help you improve the quality or quantity of your sleep:

#### Soothe Yourself

- **Listen** to white noise or relaxation CDs. Nature sounds such as the ocean or forest can be very soothing.
- **Write in a journal.** If you tend to lay in bed – or wake up – due to racing thoughts, write in a journal.
- **Relax your mind** by reading something calming, spiritual or religious. Mystery or suspense novels may have the opposite effect.
- **Relax your body** by taking a warm bath, shower or sauna before bed.
- **Relax your mind and body** through yoga meditation. Regular practice has been shown to reduce anxiety levels, increase cardiovascular efficiency and decrease the respiratory rate. Additional benefits include improved strength and flexibility.
- **No TV right before bed.** Because it stimulates the brain, it will take longer to fall asleep.

#### Food Tips

- **Do eat** a high-protein snack several hours before bedtime. This can provide the L-tryptophan needed to produce melatonin and serotonin.
- **Do not eat** snacks, particularly grains and sugars, just prior to bed. This will raise blood sugar and inhibit sleep.
- **Avoid foods you are sensitive to.** Dairy and wheat products in particular may adversely affect sleep by causing apnea, congestion, gastrointestinal upset or gas.
- **Don't drink fluids** within two hours of going to bed. This will reduce the likelihood of needing to go to the bathroom.
- **Avoid caffeine.** In some people, caffeine does not metabolize efficiently and the effects of caffeine can be felt long after consumption. Even an afternoon cup of coffee or tea may keep some people from falling asleep. Also, some medications contain caffeine.

#### Environment

- **Keep your bed for sleeping.** Avoid using your bed as a place to work, fold clothes, watch TV, brush the cat or bounce with the kids.
- **Sleep in complete darkness.** Even a little bit of light from outside, within your bedroom or an adjoining bathroom can disrupt your ability to sleep.

- **Lower the temperature.** Keep the temperature 70 degrees F or lower, based on individual comfort. Many people keep their homes too hot.
- **Wear socks** to bed if you have poor circulation. The feet often feel cold before the rest of the body.
- **Keep alarm clocks away** from view. Watching the time pass will only contribute to sleeplessness.

### Health & Wellness

- **Keep a regular bedtime.** You should go to bed and wake up at the same times each day, even on the weekends. This will help your body to get into a sleep rhythm and make it easier to fall asleep and get up feeling refreshed in the morning.
- **Exercise regularly** for at least 30 minutes everyday but not too close to bedtime.
- **Lose weight.** Being overweight can increase the risk of sleep apnea, which will prevent a restful night's sleep.
- **Hormonal changes** accompanied with menopause or perimenopause may cause problems. Get a health check.

### Cautions

- **Prescription medications** may have adverse effects on sleeping. Consult your doctor.
- **Over-the-counter medications** may help occasional insomnia, but you should not take them after taking drugs with sedating effects, or if you have breathing problems, glaucoma or difficulty urinating. Consult your doctor.
- **Sleep aids** can leave you groggy in the morning – similar to the way you feel after a restless night. Don't test the sleep aide the night prior to a day packed with commitments. Be sure to read labels about side effects and tell your doctor what you're taking.
- **Melatonin** is a powerful hormone that may improve sleep. Ideally it is best to increase levels of melatonin naturally with exposure to bright sunlight in the daytime. Consult your doctor.
- **Common products** like Excedrin PM and Tylenol PM contain diphenhydramine, an antihistamine that makes you sleepy. But you're also getting the pain reliever acetaminophen, which is fine for occasional aches but not something to take everyday.
- **Quit smoking.** According to the National Sleep Foundation, nicotine can interfere with sleep.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Although alcohol will make you drowsy, the effect is short-lived and often causes you to wake up several hours later, unable to fall back asleep. Alcohol will also keep you from falling into the deeper stages of sleep where the body does most of its healing.

### Get Help

Sleep is essential to health, safety and quality of life. Most sleep problems and sleep disorders can be diagnosed and are treatable in safe and effective ways. If you have had insomnia for a long period of time; often take daytime naps after a bad night's sleep, sleep in on weekends or stay in bed for extended periods of time; have irregular sleeping habits; have tried making lifestyle changes; tried sleep medications without significant relief and have no obvious medical condition that might impact sleep it may be time to address your concerns about sleep with your doctor. It's often impossible to make a diagnosis without taking a thorough medical history.