

SLEEP ADVICE HANDOUT

EVERYONE has trouble sleeping at some time or another, even for weeks or months at a time.

The best treatment for poor sleep is NOT medications. Medications can cause more harm than good. They are addictive and habit-forming. They cause people to “forget” how to sleep normally. Sleep medications should NEVER be taken on a routine basis, every night.

YES, you will be tired the next day after a poor night’s sleep, but it’s not the end of the world.

Sleep medications should only be used sparingly, usually less than 3 times per week. They should NOT be taken every night.

Sleep Medication Prescriptions:

- Some doctors recommend no more than 5 doses per week.
- This ensures patients do not to rely on pills every single night to sleep. It allows them to remember to retrain their bodies to fall asleep naturally.
- Even someone who works 5 days per week should not require sleeping medications during weekends.
- If you are retired or not employed, there should be even less need for sleep medications.

INSTEAD OF MEDICATIONS, TRY THE FOLLOWING ...

Sleep Hygiene:

- Avoid Caffeine. For some people, caffeine stays in their body for 24 hours.
- Avoid alcohol. Alcohol causes drowsiness, but it actually keeps you from being able to sleep properly through the night.
- Quit smoking. Cigarettes and nicotine are stimulants. They significantly interfere with sleep.
- Avoid heavy meals or too much liquid before bedtime.
- Get regular exercise during the day, but avoid heavy exercise within 3 hours of bedtime.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and comfortable temperature. Minimize noise and light. Some people need total darkness to sleep. However, a quiet background fan or “white noise” may be helpful.
- Avoid watching or checking the clock. Stop obsessing about your sleep.
- Avoid napping during the day.

- Keep a routine. Try to go to bed and wake up every day around the same time, even on weekends.

Stimulus Control:

- Remove the TV and computer from the bedroom.
- Avoid watching TV or using a computer or tablet before bed. They use bright, stimulating lights that make it difficult to fall asleep after.
- Go to bed only when you feel tired, even if later than you planned.
- Get out of bed if not able to sleep within 20 minutes. Go to another room and relax. Try a relaxing activity, such as reading. Avoid watching TV or the computer. Return to bed only when sleepy.

Relaxation Strategies:

- Avoid arousing activities before bed (i.e. late night phone calls, doing work, watching TV).
- Designate at least 1 hour before bedtime to help unwind from the day's stresses. You can even try dimming the lights.
- Do something relaxing before bed such as reading, deep breathing, stretching, yoga, relaxation CDs.

Books & Self-help:

- Go to your local bookstore or online and check out the many options to learn more about insomnia and self-manage your sleep.
- For example, "*The Insomnia Workbook*" by Stephanie Silberman and Charles Morin is an excellent book. It costs about \$16.00 online.
- If you have a smartphone, there are many apps available for insomnia and relaxation.

Sleep Consolidation

Some people with sleeping problems spend too much time in bed trying to get more sleep. Sleep consolidation is a method of trying to compress the total time in bed to match the total amount of sleep needed. Overall, this improves sleep.

- Determine the average total sleep time. *Consider the following example: you go to bed at 11pm, but do not fall asleep until 1am. Then wake at 3am and cannot fall back asleep until 3:30am. You wake again at 5am, and cannot fall back asleep until 6am. You then wake up in the morning at 7am. In this example, you are spending 8 hours in bed, but only really getting 4.5 hours sleep.*
- Take the total amount of sleep you actually get, and add 30 minutes (*This would equal 5 hours in the above example*).
- Set a consistent wake time in the morning. This should remain unchanged through the week, even on weekends. (*for example, assume you have to wake up at 7am every day for work. You should also wake up at 7am on weekends*).
- Set your initial bedtime by counting back from your morning wake-up time. (*In our example, you would count back 5 hours from 7am. Therefore, your bedtime would not be until 2am*).
- When you first start this process, you will feel like you are not getting enough sleep. However, should soon find yourself sleeping more consistently through the night. (*In this example, sleeping from 2am until 7am without frequent awakenings*).
- As you consolidate your sleep, begin to lengthen your sleep time by going to bed 30 minutes earlier each week, until you eventually get enough sleep that you feel refreshed in the morning and through the day. Most people need between 6 and 8 hours of sleep per night.