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Sleeping Well

Sleep restores our bodies and minds and allows us to keep functioning during waking hours. So it pays to make sure we get enough sleep on a regular basis. If you are not sleeping well, here are a few tips to help you develop better sleeping habits.

Firstly, try to identify what is causing the sleep problem. Worrying about not sleeping usually makes it worse. It is worth remembering that the amount of sleep needed is different from person to person, and usually our need for sleep decreases with age.

If sleep won't come then get out of bed and do something else. Don't lie there tossing and turning in a panic because you cannot sleep.

Check your bedroom temperature and that there is enough air circulating in the room. Keep the area free from noise. Avoid drinking too much coffee or other drinks containing caffeine (eg. tea and designer drinks such as V), around bedtime. Avoid taking daytime naps, rather get some exercise during the day so your body is tired and ready for rest at night. Also, try and avoid taking family or personal pressures and stresses to bed with you.

Some medicines can keep you awake if taken close to bedtime. Ask your pharmacist about medicines you may be taking that could be the reason you stay awake at night. If you suffer from pain, having adequate pain relief is important for a good night sleep.

Foods containing magnesium, vitamin B6 and tryptophan (an essential amino acid) may also help aid restful sleep. Amongst the best foods are bananas, passion fruit, barley, oats, quinoa, buckwheat and turkey. St. John's Wort is very calming and drinking chamomile tea may help too. Homeopathic or nutritional supplements may also help establish a sleeping pattern and are often used as a good starting point.

It can be helpful to give yourself some time in the evening to wind down before bed. Listen to soft music or read light-hearted books that can help you relax.

If your sleep problems are regular try keeping the bed only for sleep. Avoid watching TV, reading or working in the bedroom. Your mind and body need to know that "bed means sleep", and nothing else. Try going to bed at the same time each night and getting up straight after waking. For many insomniacs, it can mean sleeping well without the use of sleep medicines.

It is possible to program your brain so that you learn to sleep well again. However, if these self-help suggestions do not work sleep medicines may be required but these are best used only for short periods of time so you don't become dependent on them. It is better to allow our bodies to develop their own sleep patterns and routines, but medicines can have a place in helping the long-term insomniac. Sleep medicines need to be prescribed by your doctor.