

Sleep Hygiene

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Would you sleep all day if it weren't for your alarm clock? Do you hit the snooze button more times than Lindsey Lohan ends up in jail? Do you have to fight falling asleep while driving? Do you sleep extra on the weekends to "catch up?" If so, then there is a good chance that you may be sleep deprived.

Trying to balance work, family, school—and if you're lucky, a few minutes each day for yourself—often leads to a situation in which sleep becomes more of a luxury than a priority; the sacrificial lamb when it comes to getting a few more waking things done. What you may not realize is that what you lose when you forego those precious Z's can be extremely detrimental to your overall health, safety and wellbeing. In fact, studies have shown a direct link between sleep deprivation and poor job performance, increased risk of accidents, greater difficulty losing weight, moodiness, depression, high blood pressure, and diabetes. But unlike Lindsey's propensity toward the unstable, the potential consequences of sleep deprivation are something you can actively control, even if that means doing nothing more than focusing on quality when you can't necessarily get the quantity.

Like personal hygiene—a concept I like to think most of us understand and embrace (and I stress the word, *most*)—implementing a sleep hygiene routine into your daily life is a practical way to increase the quality of your sleep; and consequently reduce the likelihood of sleep-related complications. Here are a few easy ways to improve your sleep:

- **Stick to a schedule!** Go to bed and wake up within one hour of an established time—all the time. Sleeping until noon on Saturday may feel good, but doing so throws off the balance of your sleep cycle. This is a great way to avoid the frustrations of that back-to-work, Sunday night insomnia that comes from rocking the sleepy-time boat all weekend.
- **Avoid alcohol at bedtime.** Even though alcohol is a notoriously good sedater, it is a very poor sleep sustainer. Alcohol not only keeps you from falling into a deep sleep, but once the sedating effects wear off you will likely wake up in the middle of the night, probably to use the restroom.
- **Nap time.** Power naps are a healthy alternative to gallons of energy drinks, but will affect nighttime sleep when they occur after 3:00pm or last more than an hour. Keep 'em short and early.
- **Stay cool.** Cooler temperatures facilitate sleepiness. On top of helping you relax, a warm shower or bath will result in a decrease in body temperature afterward. And keeping the bedroom a little cooler than the rest of the house will seal the deal.
- **Avoid caffeine, nicotine, exercise or heavy meals before bed.** It makes no sense to stimulate a system you are trying to slow down (Physics 101...duh).
- **Create a healthy sleeping environment.** At some point we lost sight of the fact that a couch is for watching TV and a bed is for sleeping. Keep the bright lights, TV's and computers out of the bedroom. The fewer distractions, the better.
- **And by all means...relax.** Start unwinding an hour before bed. Listen to music or read a book. Practice deep breathing. Meditate. Slow down so you can ease into bed, Barry White-style.

If you want to learn more about sleep hygiene, you're too young to appreciate Barry White, or just want to talk, give me a call at 580-3309, e-mail, or stop by the Psychological Health office in Bldg 6930 (Medical Group).