

Mental Health Month Message: Sleep for Wellness

Why is sleep so important?

Mental health and wellness are linked to good sleep hygiene. When you do not get a good night's sleep for a few days, you may be at risk for developing physical and emotional symptoms.

Mental health problems can be prevented and/or managed by making a habit of getting a restful night's sleep. Mental health symptoms can worsen from interrupted sleep. Lack of sleep also gives us problems in our life activities (living, learning, working and socializing), and is a factor in many auto accidents.

What can you do to get good sleep?

Like many other health concerns, sleep is a very personal issue, and getting good sleep is very much about understanding yourself. Consider some of the following

1. What the signs are that ***you*** are well-rested (and when you are not)?
2. How much sleep do ***you*** need (most of us need a bit less as we get older)?
3. What sleep hours work best for ***you***?
4. What are the conditions that help ***you*** get good restful sleep (temperature, darkness, what you wear, amount of light, amount and kind of sound, a bath or shower before bed, reading or some other relaxing activity)?
5. How do exciting activities affect ***your*** sleep, and how do ***you*** calm down after an exciting evening to get good sleep?

6. How *visual stimulation* affects **your** sleep? For many, looking at a TV or computer screen causes extra awake-ness, so TV watching or computing right before bed time may be a bad idea.
7. How certain *substances, like caffeine¹, alcohol², and various sleep medications³* affect **your** sleep over the short-term and over the long-term?
8. How do certain *foods* affect **your** sleep? For example, many people find warm milk relaxes them and makes them sleepy, while others find that the sugar in the milk wakes them up. Drinking a lot of liquid close to bedtime is another habit that might result in you waking up to use the restroom.
9. How does exercise affect **your** sleep? Some people find that exercise before bed makes them tired and relaxed. Others find that exercise is too energizing and wakes them up, and they choose to exercise earlier in the day.

It is important to think carefully about what you know about your sleep habits, and integrate them into your daily life.

Some people start a “sleep log” to track when they actually fall asleep and wake up.

This log can help you set sleep habits and routines for good mental health and wellness.

¹ Most people, but not all people, find that this powerful stimulant drug wakes them up

² Alcohol often makes people feel sleepy, then causes them to get less than a full night’s restful sleep

³ Prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal

Sleep Log

Complete this form for each day of the week. Consider placing it where you will see it (like at the breakfast table or on the dresser) and will then remember to fill it out daily. Use this to create the sleep habits that will enhance your mental health and wellness

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| Date (month/day) | | | | | | | |
| Nap times and length | | | | | | | |
| Time you entered bedroom | | | | | | | |
| Activity in bedroom prior to trying to sleep (reading, TV, etc.) | | | | | | | |
| Time you began trying to sleep | | | | | | | |
| How long it took to fall asleep | | | | | | | |
| Number of awakenings | | | | | | | |
| Length of awakenings | | | | | | | |
| Cause of awakenings | | | | | | | |
| Final wake time /tome out of bed | | | | | | | |
| Rate sleep using a scale of 1 to 5 1 = least refreshed 5 = most refreshed | | | | | | | |
| Rest- list how long you rest- and where (setting/location) | | | | | | | |
| Comments | | | | | | | |

Adapted from the Alabama Sleep Clinic

Sleep resources

American Academy of Sleep Medicine <http://www.sleepeducation.com/>

This website includes many educational resources for people interested in sleep hygiene and sleep disorders. The website also has an active forum where members can give each other support and assistance in regard to helpful sleep/wake routines.

For more technical resources on sleep, visit the website of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine at www.aasmnet.org/

Awake in America. <http://www.awakeinamerica.org/>

This national non-profit organization is based out of Philadelphia, PA and focuses on sleep and sleep disorder issues. They assist in helping to start community based support groups on sleep management. Awake in America offers provider education, business outreach, and legislative advocacy. Their website includes articles on sleep management topics as well as a downloadable podcast.

Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine. <http://www.aasmnet.org/JCSM/>

This journal focuses on the scientific study of sleep and treatments to improve sleep. The scope of the journal includes clinical trials, case studies, clinical observations and debate and clinical reviews. Recent publications abstracts are available as well as a featured podcast.

National Sleep Foundation. <https://sleep.org/> and <http://sleepfoundation.org/>

At these two websites, you can find interesting and interactive resources on sleep and health (sleep.org) as well as educational resources on sleep and sleep disorders (sleepfoundation.org).