

## SLEEP HEALTH INITIATIVE GUIDE

### Why Sleep is Essential

Sleep is a biological necessity, fundamental for a healthy and fulfilling life. It revitalizes the mind and body, and prepares you to perform at your best. Adequate, quality sleep is just as important as eating nutritious foods and being physically active, as it allows your other healthy choices to count.

Getting the right amount of sleep can mean the difference between powering through your day and dragging yourself through it. Sleep impacts everything YOU do! As best you can, try to make sleep a priority.

### The Crucial Role of Sleep

Adequate sleep plays a crucial role in overall well-being, directly influencing physical health, cognitive function, and mental health:

- **Physical Health:** Sleep allows your body to repair and restore itself, strengthening your immune system, regulating hormones, and lowering your risk of chronic conditions like heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.
- **Cognitive Function:** A well-rested brain performs better, enhancing attention, concentration, reaction time, problem-solving skills, and creativity. Sleep is also critical for memory consolidation (converting new information into long-term memory).
- **Mental and Emotional Health:** Sleep is crucial for processing information and managing emotions. When well-rested, you are more likely to better manage your emotions, make good decisions, and cope effectively with change. Insufficient sleep is linked to increased irritability, stress, and a higher risk of developing anxiety and depression.

### What is Adequate Sleep?

Adequate sleep means both hours slept and quality of sleep. The amount of needed sleep per night varies by age group, as shown in the table on the right. Most healthy adults typically need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.

Infants, young children, and teenagers should get more sleep to support their growth and development.

It is also crucial to have high-quality sleep, not just a long duration. Quality sleep means falling asleep in 30 minutes or less; waking up no more than once per night and falling back asleep within 20 minutes if you do wake up; and, feeling rested and energized in the morning.

Age Group	Amount of sleep needed per night
Infants and toddlers	11-14 hours
Children and adolescents	9-10 hours
Adults	7-9 hours
Older adults	7-8 hours

## Why We Want People to Sleep

Data shows a lot of people don't get adequate sleep, which can be detrimental to their health and well-being. In the United States:

- 35% of adults report sleeping less than 7 hours per night;
- 14.5% have trouble falling asleep;
- 17.8% have trouble staying asleep; and
- 25% of adults experience daytime sleepiness.

This data shows that public health has work to do to educate and empower individuals to prioritize sleep as a vital pillar of health. We want people to be **intentional** about their sleep habits, which means making a conscious effort to prioritize sleep in order to achieve better health and well-being.

## How to Get Better Sleep

There are many well-studied practices that can help a person sleep better. One of the most effective recommendations is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I). CBT-I helps identify thoughts and behaviors that cause sleep problems and replace them with habits that support sound sleep. This therapy addresses what's causing sleep issues rather than just relieving symptoms.

CBT-I can benefit nearly anyone with sleep problems. These benefits include less time to fall asleep, more time spent asleep, and waking up less during the night. CBT-I requires steady practice, but the hope is that doing these intentional practices regularly will result in enhanced health, mental health, performance, memory, and behavior.

While CBT-I can be used as a model for health care providers, people can implement CBT-I principles on their own, as described in the next two sections: Sleep Hygiene and Thought Reframing.

### Sleep Hygiene

The *behavioral* part of CBT-I is focused on adopting good sleeping habits and a sleeping environment that are conducive to getting quality sleep, also known as sleep hygiene. Every person can tailor their sleep hygiene practices to suit their needs. There are five (5) key components of sleep hygiene:

#### 1. Consistent Schedule:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, including weekends, to regulate your body's internal clock (circadian rhythm). This consistency helps you feel better and makes it easier to fall asleep.
- Calculate a target bedtime based on the time you have to wake up the next day and prioritize being ready for bed around that time.

## **2. Optimized Sleep Environment (Sleep Sanctuary):**

- Dark: Use blackout curtains, shades, or an eye mask to block out all external light. Light is the most powerful cue for your internal clock.
- Cool: Keep your bedroom cool but comfortable, usually between 60 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Quiet: Turn off noisy distractions. Silence unwanted noise with earplugs or use "white noise" (fan, sound machine, or app).
- Bed Use: Use your bed only for sleep to help your brain associate your bed with rest. Keep stimulating activities like watching TV, using your laptop or phone, or working out, out of the bedroom. If you can't sleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something calming in low light before trying again.
- Comfortability: Choose a supportive, comfortable mattress, pillows, and bedding.

## **3. Relaxing Bedtime Routine & Wind Down:**

- Reserve at least 30 minutes (ideally an hour) before bedtime to wind down away from stressful or stimulating activities.
- Create an "electronic curfew" at least 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime. Turn off electronics, TVs, and computers one to two hours before bed, as the blue light can hinder melatonin production and keep your brain active.
- Choose wind down activities, such as: a warm bath, calming music, reading a physical book under dim light, deep breathing, meditation, or light stretching.
- Do not take problems to bed. Take 5 minutes to write down your worries or to-do list before bedtime. If you tend to have more pervasive negative thoughts about sleep, consider thought reframing exercises described in the next section.

## **4. Avoid Sleep Disruptors:**

- Caffeine: Avoid consumption for 8 to 10 hours before bedtime, especially in the afternoon and evening, as it is a stimulant.
- Alcohol: While it may make you drowsy initially, it disrupts your sleep cycle and can lead to disrupted sleep later in the night.
- Nicotine: As a stimulant, nicotine interferes with sleep.
- Heavy Meals: Finish eating large, heavy, or spicy meals 2-3 hours before bedtime. If you need a snack, choose a light option with protein and complex carbs.

## **5. Beneficial Daytime Habits:**

- Regular exercise, especially in the morning or afternoon, can promote deeper sleep. Avoid heavy exercise within a few hours of bedtime, as it can raise your body temperature and heart rate.
- Get outside and see sunlight for at least 15 minutes each morning to help regulate your circadian rhythm and signal to your body that it's time to be awake.
- Avoid long or late naps, as they can reduce sleepiness at night.

## Thought Reframing

The *cognitive* part of CBT-I teaches you to identify and change beliefs that affect your ability to sleep. This approach can help you control or get rid of negative thoughts and worries that keep you awake or disrupt your sleep. Negative thoughts are often unrealistic and not helpful. The body reacts to these negative thoughts with stress, activating the nervous system, making it harder to sleep.

Since thoughts are learned, they can be unlearned. It's possible to improve sleep by learning new, healthier ways to think through thought reframing. There are four steps to thought reframing:

1. Learn about sleep in order to have a more accurate view about sleep.
2. Write down negative thoughts when they're occurring: at bedtime, during the night if awakened, or after getting out of bed in the morning. This will help you get into the habit of noticing and taking action against negative thoughts as soon as they arise.
3. At a later time, review this list and observe how your thoughts are negative or inaccurate. Write down a more accurate/positive thought for each negative thought you have. Some examples are: "I will have a good, restful night's sleep." "My sleep will get better if I keep working on it."
4. When you find yourself thinking negative thoughts, replace them by thinking to yourself the more accurate and realistic thoughts from your list.

Daily practice will result in better sleep. Don't give up hope and don't be hard on yourself if your practice isn't perfect. Just pick up where you left off and keep working at it.

## Track Your Sleep

To help ensure you are being intentional about adopting new sleep habits, keep a sleep diary to identify possible obstacles. Track the following each day for at least two weeks:

- Time you go to bed and wake up
- Length and quality of the previous night's sleep
- Time and amount of caffeine, alcohol, or nicotine consumption
- Time you eat dinner and anything after that
- When and how long you exercise
- Time you put down electronic devices and stop watching TV
- Your thoughts and feelings before going to bed

Look for patterns between your behaviors and thoughts, and your sleep duration or quality that may help you identify factors that are interfering with your sleep.

## When to Talk to a Doctor

Adopting new sleep habits can take time and patience. While these strategies can significantly improve sleep, they may not be enough for chronic or serious problems. If you have ongoing trouble falling or

staying asleep, it may be a sign of an underlying sleep disorder. Talk with a healthcare provider or sleep specialist for proper diagnosis and treatment options.

## **Conclusion**

By prioritizing and being intentional about your sleep, you are investing in your overall well-being. Adequate, quality sleep is a powerful catalyst, strengthening your physical health, optimizing your mental health and cognitive function, and improving your emotional state and behavior.

Quality sleep is the foundation that allows all your other healthy choices to truly count, ensuring you can perform and feel your very best. Embracing the principles of this initiative offers a clear, actionable path to better rest, and is a positive step toward a life with enhanced performance, memory, health, and a greater capacity to thrive.

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