

LEARN TO SLEEP WELL

By Terri Phillips, MFT

We all know how important it is to get enough sleep. Recent research in news reports suggests that as many as 1/3 of the population doesn't get enough sleep. Lack of sleep has been shown to contribute to multiple health problems. A lack of sleep also diminishes the quality of life and your ability to have positive family time. When we don't sleep, we are often irritable and lack energy for the things we enjoy.

How much is enough sleep? Experts suggest that adults have 7 - 8.5 hours of uninterrupted sleep and children need as much as 10 - 12 hours of sleep in order to feel rested and function well. The next question is how we achieve these goals with the busy lives we lead and the multiple stressors we experience from day to day. First of all, we need to insure that we follow the basic fundamentals listed below that contribute to adequate sleep:

- Make sure to limit caffeine intake throughout the day and eliminate it entirely after 2 pm.
- Use your bed for only sleeping or intimacy. Watching TV, video games, even reading should be done in another area of the house.
- Exercise earlier in the day as sometimes exercise can stimulate the brain to wake up.
- Take a bath before bed to prepare your body temperature for rest.
- Reduce your intake of carbohydrates right before bed.
- Limit any alcohol intake to one drink for women and two drinks for men. Although alcohol may make you feel tired initially, it contributes to waking during the night and a lack of restful sleep.
- Save any problem issues to discuss with your spouse or children for earlier in the evening rather than right before sleep.
- Try to go to bed and awake during the same schedule each day of the week even on the weekends.

If you are already following the above list and your sleep is still problematic, there may be an issue with brain regulation. Stress, heredity, trauma, mental health issues and bad habits can all contribute to brain regulation issues. When you are able to train your brain to be calm, alert and focused throughout the day, your sleep patterns will regulate. Neurofeedback is a non-invasive exercise involving computer equipment that can help regulate the over-aroused brain to aid in regular sleep patterns. Sensors are connected to your scalp and ears while your brain plays the computer game. Exercise is important for your body and for your brain to improve your sleep.

According to Robert W. Hill, PhD and Eduardo Castro MD authors of Healing Young Brains (2009), parents should be concerned about children in our society getting enough sleep. “ A young brain needs more sleep time because it is growing, maturing and reorganizing.” Sometimes when children have symptoms that look like ADHD, they are instead, sleep deprived. Once the sleep issue is resolved, the symptoms disappear. Sometimes adults who are sleep deprived look to the outside world like they are lazy or non productive with higher rates of physical and mental illnesses. Resolving sleep pattern issues with neurofeedback will make your mind and body healthier. Your brain has the ability to learn to sleep well so get a good night’s rest!!!

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