

## Good night, sleep well

Most adults experience occasional sleepless nights, and about 30 million people in the United States suffer from chronic insomnia. Insomnia is one of the most frequent medical complaints.

Insomniacs either cannot fall asleep upon retiring or they fall asleep quickly but cannot stay asleep and wake up early. They are often bothered by undue worry, stress and/or physical discomfort.

Adequate rest ranks alongside proper nutrition and regular exercise as a major requirement for optimum health and well-being. Sleep is necessary to refresh and restore the body and mind. It is a part of the schedule of body rhythms that occur about every 24 hours.

The heartbeat, blood pressure, metabolism, blood cell count, cell reproduction and repair and other processes also operate roughly on this 24-hour schedule. These body rhythms influence a person's judgment, endurance under stress and competence on the job. The body knows enough to try to follow this rhythm to keep it functioning properly. Any disruption in the body's rhythm can result in more than just fatigue. Such disruption can sometimes have serious and far-reaching emotional and physical effects. Today's research shows that keeping regular hours is still sound advice.

### Tips for a restful night

- **Exercise more.** Physical activity usually increases the quantity and quality of your sleep time.
- **Do not go to bed until you are sleepy.** Lying in bed wide-eyed can be frustrating. Stay up and allow sleepiness to overtake you.
- **Have a light snack.** A light snack diverts blood from the brain to the digestive tract and produces drowsiness. Warm milk works well. Stay away from caffeinated products such as coffee, tea, colas and chocolate and do not eat heavy foods or large quantity of food right before going to bed.
- **Avoid napping.** If you are feeling fatigued you'll be better off in the long run if you stay awake and tough it out until bedtime.
- **Do something constructive.** Read, write a letter, clean house, cook, or watch TV.

- **Count sheep.** It's not the sheep that put you to sleep; it's doing a very repetitive, boring task. This is particularly helpful when you have an overactive mind.
- **Take two aspirins.** Believe it or not, aspirin, providing it contains no caffeine, will often promote sleep. *Check with your doctor first.*
- **Think about pleasant, soothing things.** Mental imagery helps to push worries out of the mind and relax the body. Soothing music, meditation or a good book may also help the mind relax.
- **Isolate your bedroom from sounds.** Light and other environmental stimuli may interfere with sleep. Try using ear plugs and eyeshades.
- **Avoid pills and sedatives for insomnia.** Sleeping pills can be addictive, and the sleep afforded by pills is generally poor quality.
- **Avoid using alcohol to induce sleep.** Alcohol is a depressant drug and provides low-quality sleep. The danger of addiction is also present.
- **Emotional assistance may be needed.** If none of these ideas works for you, you might consider seeking professional assistance in getting help for insomnia. See the "For more help" section below for a phone number to call.

The amount of sleep a person should get is the amount needed to feel rested, alert and refreshed. If you find that you are not getting the sleep you need because of chronic insomnia, you should try to identify the cause of your sleeplessness and discuss the problem with your doctor.

### For more help

For emergencies, call GHS' Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, [www.genhs.org](http://www.genhs.org) ©