Get adequate sleep to help fight stress

Stress experts report that chronically stressed people almost always suffer from fatigue and people who are tired do not cope well with stress. When distressed people get more sleep, they feel better and are more resilient and adaptable in dealing with day-to-day events.

Did you know that most sleep difficulties (about 80%) are either caused or reinforced by our own behaviors or daily habits? If you have trouble sleeping, the tips below will help you get the most out of your hours in bed:

**Stay away from stimulants.** Coffee, tea, colas, chocolate and some over-the-counter medications contain caffeine which stimulates the central nervous system and increases blood pressure and heart rate. Drinking a can of cola or cup of coffee in the late afternoon can keep you awake at midnight. Avoid consuming caffeine at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.

**Don’t smoke, especially before bed.** The nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant. Insomnia is among smokers’ greatest complaints. Research shows that smokers take longer to fall asleep and wake up more often during the night than nonsmokers. Having a smoke before bed may feel relaxing, but it is actually putting a stimulant into your bloodstream.

**Go to bed at regular hours.** An erratic schedule can cause problems such as “Sunday night insomnia.” This problem occurs to people who stay up late and sleep late on weekends and then try to switch back to their usual bedtime to prepare for Monday morning. Try to go to bed at roughly the same time each night and, no matter how long you slept, get up at your usual time in the morning.

**Exercise regularly.** Sleep is facilitated by relaxation and exercised muscles relax more easily. Aim for 20 minutes of exercise that increases your heart rate at least three times a week. Late afternoon is best.

**Don’t use alcohol to induce sleep.** A nightcap can lull you to sleep, but alcohol typically produces light, unsettled sleep. Also, using alcohol to fall asleep could lead to dependency.

**Establish a relaxing bedtime routine.** Set the mood for relaxation before bed. Start letting down about an hour before bedtime: read, listen to music or take a warm bath.

**Don’t take sleeping pills; they induce less restful sleep and can cause serious problems.** Oftentimes, the person relying on sleeping pills is left with his/her original insomnia, plus a drug problem.

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