



Improving your sleep

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Everyone at some time

or other has trouble falling asleep staying asleep—this is insomnia. Sleep problems

arise from a variety of reasons: stress or worry, an irregular schedule or developing bad sleep habits. If this problem persists for a long period, it can lead to health problems... and worrying about it can make it worse!

A sleep problem can become so tiring that it affects your everyday life, work or even leisure time. Discovering the reasons for not sleeping can be challenging, but there are certain causes that are quite common.

Sleep problems include not being able to fall asleep; falling asleep just fine, but waking up again and not being able to go back to sleep. For some, the problem is waking up often throughout the night. Whatever the situation, when morning comes, so does a tiredness that will last all day.

Among the many things that can affect sleep are the things we eat or drink. Eating a heavy meal right before bed, especially one with lots of protein, means digesting will keep you awake. Research also shows that the more fat you consume during the day, the less easy will be your sleep. Caffeine we all know about: avoid it for the four to six hours before bed — don't forget the hidden sources of caffeine. It is found in coffee and tea of course, but also in decaf coffee, chocolate, cola and in many medications and herbal products.

Medications all have some side effects. These may include insomnia and drowsiness; in some cases, both are cautioned because different people react differently. Both over-the-counter and prescription medica-

tions can contain caffeine. Even “natural” products can hide caffeine. Yerba Mate, for example, is used in some weight loss products. The main ingredient in this herbal remedy? Yup, caffeine.

Melatonin is used to help induce sleep, but again, it may not work for everyone. However, if it has not started working after a few days, it will not work so discontinue using it. Valerian is another herbal product that has helped some people. This one may take a week or more of regular use to start working.

There are things we can do and habits to develop that will help us sleep.

Getting exercise during the day is a great way to help induce sleep later, just don't do it right before bed as it will do the opposite. Eating a light snack before bed can help, especially if it includes tryptophan-rich foods like dairy (yes, a warm glass of milk), bananas, oats and honey. Including some carbohydrates can enhance the tryptophan effect, too.

Nicotine is a stimulant not unlike caffeine, so that “last one before bed” or one during the night will definitely not help you sleep. (Better yet, why smoke at all — we had to say it!)

Another useful tip is to do something relaxing before bedtime. Try deep breathing, yoga, meditation, tai chi or muscle relaxation. Maybe take a warm

bath or read a book. Whatever you do, keep the bedroom for sleep and intimacy. It is NOT your second office or workshop.

And of course, dark and quiet both help. Now... sssshhhhhhhh. Good night.

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