

During the COVID-19 pandemic, your EAP is available for counseling sessions using phone or video.

Balanced Living – September 2020

How You Can Get a Better Night's Sleep

Despite common belief, aging doesn't cause sleep problems, and seniors don't need less sleep as they grow older.

Most older people sleep poorly, or not long enough, because of ailments associated with aging, such as arthritis, physical disabilities, respiratory problems and depression.

Lack of exercise, heart disease, anxiety, stress and menopause also can disrupt sleep, and many medications seniors take can cause insomnia.

Changing patterns

"Many people believe that sleeping poorly is just part of growing old. In fact, seniors who fall asleep during the day do so because they aren't getting enough quality sleep at night," says Sonia Ancoli-Israel, M.D., director of the Sleep Disorders Clinic at the San Diego Veterans Affairs Medical Center in California.

Though the need for eight hours of sleep each night doesn't change with age, sleep patterns do. The body's circadian rhythm, a biological clock that controls sleep, naturally advances a few hours as a person grows older. When that happens, older people may feel sleepy earlier in the evening and wake up earlier in the morning. By observing their natural sleep patterns and making lifestyle changes, seniors can help keep their internal clocks on time and overcome sleep problems.



Sleep remedies

Sleep and aging experts agree that one's daytime activities and sleep environment are critical to getting a good night's sleep.

Try the following remedies if you have trouble sleeping.

- Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day.

- Ask your doctor if any of your medications could be disturbing your sleep.
- Stay active. Maintain a moderate level of daily activity and do gentle exercise.
- Spend some time outdoors during daylight hours. Sunlight can help set your biological clock.
- Pay attention to what you eat and drink in the evening. Consuming foods and drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea or cola can interfere with nighttime sleep.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages in the evening. They can make you fall asleep faster, but they cause early morning awakenings and fitful sleep.
- Don't smoke. Smokers are more likely to have trouble sleeping than nonsmokers.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and cool.
- Replace your mattress if it's lumpy, sagging or worn out. A comfortable mattress that offers good support can help you fall asleep and stay asleep.
- Ask a doctor for help if your partner snores or has an illness that disturbs your sleep.

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Your Teen's SOS Signals

It's way past midnight, and once again your adolescent has broken curfew. Finally, she arrives home. When you ask for an explanation, she races past you without a word, runs to her bedroom and slams the door behind her.

Infuriating? You bet. But whatever you do, don't react on your emotions. "Instead, stay calm; get the facts and after everyone's had a chance to cool down, talk things out," says John Rowlett, M.D., a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics who specializes in treating adolescents. He offers these tips on how to communicate effectively about the problem:



How to communicate effectively:

- Go to a neutral setting and try to have both parents present.
- Other siblings or people should not be there.
- Start out by saying, "I am concerned about ..."
- Don't pass judgment or be defensive.
- Find common areas that you agree on and establish some rules.

- Discuss with your teen what would be a reasonable punishment.
- Forget any kind of physical contact as punishment; this will not work.
- Some teens communicate better in writing. Encourage your teen to write down their feelings.

When things settle down and times are good, review the boundaries you set. For example: "You know when your curfew is. If you break it, you have crossed the line and will be punished by ..." Remind your child of all the good times you have had together and how you have always been there for her.

Still, sometimes no matter how hard you try to do things right, they don't come out right and the behavior problems continue. While an occasional broken rule usually is not cause for concern, there are ways to tell if your child is having significant problems.

Here are some clear signals from your teen that he or she wants or needs help:

- A sudden, dramatic drop in school performance.
- A change in friends, eating, dress or favorite activities.
- Fighting or getting arrested.
- Substance abuse.
- Sexual promiscuity.

When your teen is sending these SOS signals, it may be time to get help. But remember, that doesn't mean you have to seek out a person with a therapy license (such as a psychologist or social worker). While these professionals certainly can help, your minister, a relative, or anyone else your child can identify with and you can trust can help, too. "And don't be afraid to call in the authorities; a cop intervening can straighten up a kid real fast," says Dr. Rowlett.

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Nutrition and the Family

September is Fruit and Veggies, More Matters Month. The sooner you talk to your kids about nutrition, the sooner they can start making smart decisions related to their own health and wellbeing. It's not easy to get kids to eat right. But, if you and your family work together, you can all start off on a path that leads to happier, healthier living.