



# FAMILY *Matters*

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## Good Sleep Habits Can Promote Health and Well Being

Proper sleep habits promotes good physical and psychological health as well concentration, focus and productivity. However, proper sleep is often problematic for many. In a recent Consumer Reports survey, 27% of adults regularly have trouble falling and staying asleep. About 68% struggled to get enough sleep at least once a week. Sleep deprivation can contribute to depression, obesity, heart disease and other health issues. Fatigue can also contribute to poor alertness that could result in job related and driving accidents. For children and teens, poor sleep habits can contribute to academic and behavioral problems.

So why is proper sleep so elusive? For parents, getting children to their multiple activities and working longer hours into the evening hours can contribute to staying up later than usual impacting on your normal sleep wake cycle. Checking work emails into the later evening hours and use of electronic devices can further inhibit our falling asleep. Specifically, the light from electronic devices blocks the release of our natural melatonin which is critical to sleep induction. Light from electronic devices is particularly problematic for teens given how hyper focused they are on social media late into the evening. For both children and adults, medications and mood conditions can contribute to poor sleep. Additionally, stress can inhibit sleep since it can lead to excessive worrying when trying to fall asleep.

A quick fix that many use is taking sleep medication. According to a recent analysis by Consumer Reports, these pills can help a person to fall asleep about 6-20 minutes sooner than those who don't take a pill, but have unwanted side effects the next day. The next day effects can include drowsiness, increased risk of falling and car accidents. So the question becomes, "is the small gain worth the side effects." The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for sleep problems over medications because CBT has shown to improve sleep without the unwanted side effects.

The first critical step would be to determine if medical and/or psychological conditions, and medications are contributing to sleep problems. After these are ruled out, or addressed, then CBT should be considered which could include:

- Education about sleep cycles.
- Use of a sleep log to accurately record sleep behaviors.
- Avoidance of caffeine, sugar and alcohol prior to sleep.
- Regulating your sleep cycle by getting up the same time every day.
- Disputing irrational and catastrophic beliefs about difficulty falling asleep (i.e., I'll never fall asleep).
- Avoidance of day time naps.
- Developing a consistent soothing nighttime routine that

will cue your body to prepare for sleep.

- Limit use of electronics 2 hours prior to sleep since light from these devices blocks normal melatonin production.
- Drinking a warm beverage.
- Dimming the lights in your bedroom and do relaxing things prior to sleep.
- Doing relaxation exercises that include focused breathing and relaxing imagery.
- Listening to relaxing music.
- Avoiding big meals close to bedtime.
- Exercising regularly but not close to bedtime.
- If you have stress or worries on your mind, journal your thoughts and a corresponding plan of action but do not bring the journal into your bedroom.

For children that may experience night time anxieties (fear of monsters, etc.), CBT could be helpful. But the single most important thing to do for children is to ensure that they sleep in their own bed when anxious or fearful. They need to learn how to deal with these normal anxieties. Allowing them into the parental bed may feel like a solution since it quiets the child, but it often exacerbates the problem over a longer period of time.

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