



May – Better Sleep Month

*"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord,
make me dwell in safety." Psalm 4:8*



Does it often take you more than 30 minutes to fall asleep at night? Do you wake up frequently during the night? Do you have a hard time falling back to sleep? When you awaken, do you feel groggy and lethargic? Do you feel drowsy during the day particularly during monotonous situations? If you answered "yes" to any one of these questions, you may have a "sleep debt" that is affecting you in ways you don't even realize. And, you're not alone. A recent NSF *Sleep in America* poll found that a majority of American adults experience sleep problems.

Sleep is not merely a "time out" from our busy routines; it is essential for healing, good health, mental and emotional functioning and safety. Researchers have found that people with chronic insomnia are more likely than others to develop several kinds of psychiatric problems, and are also likely to make greater use of healthcare services. Sleep deprivation and sleep disorders are estimated to cost Americans over \$100 billion annually in lost productivity, medical expenses, sick leave, and property and environmental damage.

Up to 40% of adults report at least occasional difficulty sleeping, chronic and/or severe insomnia affect about 10-15% of adults, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Sleep apnea, a breathing disorder characterized by brief interruptions of breathing during sleep, affects as many as 18 million people, according to the NIH. People suffering from a sleep disorder called sleep apnea are at risk for high blood pressure, heart attacks, stroke and motor vehicle crashes if left untreated.

But, even occasional sleeping problems can make daily life feel more stressful or cause you to be less productive. Many who say they have trouble getting enough sleep, report a greater difficulty concentrating, accomplishing required tasks, and handling minor irritations. Sleep loss has also been found to impair the ability to perform tasks involving memory, learning, and logical reasoning.

Insufficient sleep can also be extremely dangerous, leading to serious or even fatal accidents. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has estimated more than 100,000 auto crashes annually are fatigue related. These drowsy driving crashes cause more than 1500 deaths and tens of thousands of injuries and lasting disabilities. This problem has been found to affect drivers aged 25 and under more than any other age group.

So how much sleep is enough?

Sleep needs vary. In general most healthy adults need seven to nine hours of sleep a night. However, some individuals are able to function without sleepiness or drowsiness after as little as six hours of sleep. Other can't perform at their peak unless they've slept ten hours. And contrary to common myth, the need for sleep doesn't decline with age (although the ability to get it all at one time may be reduced).

Before Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb, people slept an average of 10 hours a night; today Americans average 6.9 hours of sleep on weeknights and 7.5 hours per night on weekends.

What are the biggest "Sleep Stealers"?

Stress is a major cause of short-term sleeping difficulties. Common triggers include school or job related pressures, a family or marriage problem, and a serious illness or death in the family. Usually the sleep problem disappears when the stressful situation passes. However, if short-term sleep problems such as insomnia aren't managed properly from the beginning, they can persist long after the original stress has passed. It is always a good idea to talk to your physician about any sleeping problem that recurs or persists for longer than one week. Your doctor can help you take steps early to control or prevent poor sleep. Since insomnia can also be brought on by depression, evaluation by a healthcare professional is essential.

There are also things you may be doing during the day or night that work against getting a good night's sleep such as: drinking alcohol or beverages containing caffeine in the afternoon or evening, exercising close to bedtime, following an irregular morning and nighttime schedule, and working or doing other mentally intense activities right before or after getting into bed. A distracting sleep environment such as a room that is too hot or too cold, too noisy or too brightly lit can be a barrier to sound sleep.

Interruptions from children or other family members can also disrupt sleep. (continued on page 5)

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A number of physical problems can interfere with your ability to fall or stay asleep. For example, arthritis and other conditions that cause pain, backache, or discomfort can make it difficult to sleep well. Disorders that cause involuntary limb movements during sleep, such as Restless Legs Syndrome break up the normal sleep pattern.

Medications such as decongestants, steroids and some medications for high blood pressure, asthma, or depression can cause sleeping difficulties as a side effect.

What's the Secret to Good Sleep?

Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol in the late afternoon and evening. Caffeine and nicotine can delay your sleep, and alcohol may interrupt your sleep later in the night. Exercise regularly, but do so at least three hours before bedtime. A workout after that time may actually keep you awake because your body has not had a chance to cool down. Instead, involve yourself in a relaxing activity before bedtime such as listening to soothing music, reading or praying, until you feel sleepy. Keep your sleep environment pleasant, comfortable, dark, and quiet. Establish a regular bedtime routine that will allow you to unwind and send a "signal" to your brain that it's time to sleep. Prayer and reflection is a wonderful way in which to close your day and hand all the trials and tribulations over to God. "He's going to be up all night, anyway, right?" Try to clear your mind, not solve the daily problems.

Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30) God intends for us to have rest. He has a clear plan for good hard work and then refreshing quiet. "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heavens." (Ecc. 3:1) God himself rested on the seventh day. He designed sleep and rest to be a wonderful restorer of strength and enthusiasm, a time when body and mind can be renewed.

Heavenly Father, You created Sabbath and rest so that we may better serve You.

Help us to know You created us to be human beings, not human doings.

Grant us Your peace, a peace that transcends all understanding.

*We ask this in the Name of Jesus, with the Almighty God and Father,
and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.*

Special thanks to Mary Mauer, Parish Nurse for her contribution to this article

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