*Improving the Quality of Your Sleep*

*November 16, 2021*

Skills for Life Coaching

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Facts to Consider

**Sleep is essential** for the normal healthy functioning of the human body and mind. While in sleep, your brain stays active, overseeing a wide variety of biological maintenance tasks that keep your body running in optimal condition. Most of the body’s healing happens during sleep.

A normal night’s sleep consists of **a series of reoccurring cycles** made up of five stages: stage 1, stage 2, stage 3, stage 4 and rapid eye movement (REM). Lasting approximately 90 minutes, a single sleep cycle progresses from stage 1 (light sleep) to REM sleep.

A healthy adult needs **between 7.5 and 9 hours of sleep per night** to function at their best. A nightly, restful sleep should be seen as a necessity, not a luxury.

**Alcohol’s** sedative effects induce sleep for the first half of sleep. As the alcohol wears off it begins to negatively affect the second half of sleep. These include the loss of REM stage important for memory and concentration; causes shallow sleeping with frequent wakening, and increases sleep apnea.

**Stimulating activities** close to bedtime make it more difficult to fall asleep. These include TV, use of computer, phone calls or deep or intense conversations with a spouse, family member or friend should be avoided in the hour before bedtime

**Sleep deprivation** has been shown to trigger symptoms such as suicidal thoughts, paranoia, agitation and hyperactivity.

**Regular exercise** reduces stress and will help you fall asleep faster and sleep more soundly. Try and finish exercising at least three hours before bedtime or if possible work out early in the day,

**Digestion** can interfere with falling asleep. Avoid eating foods within an hour of going to bed. Helpful foods such as turkey, whole grains and milk contain the amino acid tryptophan that research suggests helps enhance the brain chemical serotonin which is associated with the sleep process.

**Nicotine** users often sleep very lightly and have reduced amounts of REM sleep. They also tend to wake up after 3 or 4 hours of sleep due to nicotine withdrawal.

Self-Evaluation: Sleeping Well

1. Describe a regular night’s sleep for you.
2. What are you usually doing during the hour before you go to sleep each night?
3. Why do you think you are not sleeping or sleeping to much?
4. If you are not sleeping well, what are you doing during those hours of the night?

Improving the Quality of your Sleep

Establish a set schedule (daily bedtime and wake-up time). This will help train your body to fall asleep faster and remain asleep longer. If you find it difficult to get up in the morning, try setting a wake-up time that is a multiple of 90 minutes, the length of an average sleep cycle. For example, if you go to bed at 10:30 pm, set your alarm for 6 am instead of 6:30 am or 7 am. You may feel more refreshed when you wake up because you are getting up at the end of a sleep cycle when your body and brain are close to wakefulness.

 Bedtime: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Wake-up Time: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Adjust habits that may be hindering your sleep such as caffeine, alcohol, bedtime snacks, screen use, etc.

What is one negative influence on sleep that I am willing to adjust?

Improving the Quality of your Sleep

Plan a soothing pre-sleep routine 30-45 minutes before your preferred bedtime. This routine or ritual will signal your brain and body towards sleep. This will ease the transition from wake to asleep with a period of relaxing activities an hour or so before bed.

 Use your technology to aid sleep:

* Set a soothing alarm to signal start of bedtime routine
* Schedule Night Shift (iPhone) or Night Light (Android) with start of bedtime ritual
* Turn off messages and alerts (Do not disturb)
* Charge your phone overnight outside your bedroom

 Pre-Sleep Routine Ideas:

* + Read a relaxing book
	+ Listen to soothing music
	+ Use relaxing techniques (breathing, light stretches, etc)
	+ Take a hot bath

Ideas for Creating a Relaxing Bedroom Environment:

* + Dim lighting
	+ Change into comfortable clothing
	+ Adjust room temperature
	+ Remove stressful reminders from room –bills, mail or mess

Outline a pre-sleep routine for yourself:

Beginning Time: …………………….

1…………………………………………………………………………….

2…………………………………………………………………………….

3…………………………………………………………………………….

4…………………………………………………………………………….

Improving the Quality of your Sleep

To understand where adjustments may be needed, it is important to assess the quality and quantity of your sleep. A one week sleep diary is provided with this handout. Consider using it as master sheet and making multiple copies to use as a sleep diary on an ongoing basis.

1. Write the date next to the associated day
2. Place an **‘X’** in each box to indicate the hours you slept that day **or** use a highlighter or color pencil to shade in the hours you slept.
3. Circle the times you wake-up and wat time you went back to sleep during the night.
4. On the fatigue scale, circle the item that best describes how you felt during the day.
5. On the back make personal notes about any factors that contributed to sleep disturbances.