

INSOMNIA

Hopefully we adequately explored the possibility of depression interrupting your sleep (typically falling asleep fine but awakening at 2 or 3 am and not falling back asleep). Likewise your breathing pattern is hopefully not disturbed. We have sleep labs to better define such “sleep apnea” disorders. And legs that are irresistibly moving about at night causing you to awaken might be the restless leg syndrome and can be treated with their own medications.

But you are still concerned about your poor sleeping. Perhaps you are seeing a lot of ads on TV for sleeping pills. No matter what you may have seen, all sleeping pills share a common problem. Used regularly they cause some change in your daytime alertness and soon lose their ability to get you to sleep. Occasional use (no more than 3 times a week) can benefit some people, especially overseas travelers or those experiencing unusually stressful but temporary situations.

There are good approaches to improving your sleep. You have probably tried the most obvious: minimizing your daytime napping, stopping suspicious over the counter medications especially weight loss aids, stopping caffeine [power drinks especially] intake after lunch, adding “white” noise to the bedroom (like a fan), making your evening meal a very light one (with minimal fat or meat), and relaxing the hour before retiring. Here are some facts you might not have known that may assist you as well:

Alcohol relaxes you but even one glass alters your sleep pattern, giving you a less restful night.

Exercise- even a brisk walk- has been recommended for several thousand years to clear one’s head and prepare for sleep.

Prayer box- writing your concerns down on a piece of paper and putting it into a prayer box (to be opened every few months) is a great way to train yourself that spending nights awake worrying is entirely fruitless. The one rule about the prayer box, however, is that once you put the concern into the box, you are releasing it to God and not thinking about it anymore that night.

Routines do a body good. Try to make a consistent routine, even a consistent bedtime if possible. Plan a relaxing activity like reading a book... something you will look forward to. Some like a bath. Try to make sleep an intentional activity after the routine. Watching TV till you fall asleep is not a good way for most as TV is packed with intentionally stimulating scenes, and you are not in charge of the “drop off time.” Further, most then need to get up to turn the TV off later.

Don’t watch the clock! Keep it out of view.

As we get older we need **less sleep**.

If you are unsuccessful in “dropping-off” after thirty minutes, **GET OUT OF BED!** Here is where the psychiatrist in you has to take control of your psyche. You must celebrate the gift of time (and not get angry over your sleeplessness). Worry is not allowed. Use this gift of time to journal out a problem or write a needed letter. Imagine how many gifts

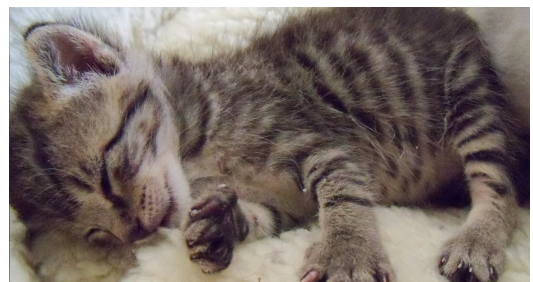


of love you create in those sleepless nights. If you don’t have someone to write to, write a soldier, or make cookies for a neighbor. Most of us are not so creative, and cozying up with a good book is sufficient. Not allowed are computer games or TV (both are designed to stimulate you, and we want you to relax). When you get sleepy – go back to bed. If you don’t get sleepy, you will have enjoyed your night and have something to show for it. It is very unusual for the body to do this more than one night in a row. Try not to nap, as your body will think it had its way with you instead of the other way around.

The astute reader will see that you are supposed to get out of bed in 30 minutes but shouldn’t be looking at your clock! I like a prayer that lasts 30 minutes (anyone can learn the 30’ rosary). If I finish the rosary I get up.

Regular physicals (yearly after 50 years old) may put your mind at ease knowing we are following evidence-based medicine to ensure your continued health.

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