

*Maryland State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program*  
*Wellness Tip Sheet*

**Tips to Improve Your Sleep**

Sleep is vital to your health and wellbeing. Studies have shown that not getting enough sleep can cause you to feel tired and sluggish the next day, and can affect your ability to concentrate. A lack of sleep can make it difficult to focus and can effect memory, judgment, reactions, as well as other functions. If sleep deprivation continues, it can lead to more serious conditions such as mood swings, anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. Studies have shown that sleep helps our body's neurons repair themselves, which allows our body to recharge.

**How Much Sleep Do We Need?**

Age plays a large part in how much sleep one requires. Everyone's need for sleep is different but on average an adult needs 7 to 8 hours a night. Some can go with as few as 5 and some need as much as 10 hours a night. Infants need on average 16 hours while teenagers require 9 hours a night.

**How do you know if you are sleep deprived?**

Sleep experts say you haven't had enough sleep if you feel tired and drowsy during the day, even when involved in boring activities. If you typically fall asleep 5 minutes after lying down, you may have severe sleep deprivation, possibly even a sleep disorder.

**Tips to help you get a better night's sleep?**

*Adapted from "When You Can't Sleep: The ABCs of ZZZs," by the National Sleep Foundation.*

- Stick to a sleep schedule:
  - Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning
  - Changing your sleep schedule disrupts your sleep cycle and can lead to insomnia
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol:
  - Avoid caffeinated drinks and food. Sources of caffeine include coffee, tea, chocolate, soft drinks, diet drugs, "energy" drinks, and some pain relievers. Caffeine is a stimulant and can keep you awake.
  - Individuals who smoke often sleep very lightly and wake up early in the morning due to nicotine withdrawal.
  - Alcohol can help you fall asleep, but the quality of your sleep is affected. Alcohol keeps the body from deep sleep and REM. It keeps the body in the lightest stages of sleep and you often can wake up feeling tired and sluggish.
- Exercise:
  - Daily exercise for 20 to 30 minutes helps you sleep.
  - Exercising too close to bedtime can interfere with your sleep. Try to finish exercising at least 5 to 6 hours prior to going to bed.
- Control your room temperature:
  - A room that is too hot or too cold can interfere with falling asleep and staying asleep.

- Relax before bed:
  - Read, take a warm bath, meditate or find another relaxing routine to help you fall asleep and stay asleep.
  - Learn how to do deep breathing and progressive relaxation. Both techniques can help you relax and fall asleep (See exercises below).
- Don't lie in bed awake:
  - If initially you can't fall asleep, don't stay in bed. Worrying about not being able to sleep can cause anxiety and keep you awake. Get out of bed and do something until you are tired like listen to music, read, or watch TV.
  - If you wake up after being asleep and can't go back to sleep, get out of bed, but **don't** turn on the lights, TV, or computer. This will send the message to your body to wake up. Staying in bed tossing and turning and getting upset that you can't sleep only will make you more anxious and keep you awake. Instead, try sitting quietly and doing deep breathing, progressive relaxation, or meditation.
- Sleep until sunlight:
  - If possible, wake up with the sun, or use very bright lights in the morning. Sunlight helps the body's internal biological clock reset itself each day. Sleep experts recommend exposure to an hour of morning sunlight for people having problems falling asleep.
- See a doctor if you're sleeping difficulties continue:

If you have problems falling asleep night after night or wake up frequently and feel tired the next day you may have a sleep disorder and should call your doctor. Start with your primary care doctor who can recommend a specialist if necessary. Most sleep disorders can be treated so you can get the sleep that you need.

#### **Deep Breathing Exercise**

Deep breathing is a simple relaxation technique. Deep breathing release stress from the body and clears the mind, improving both physical and mental wellness.

- Sit up straight or lie down on your back
- Exhale completely through your mouth
- Place your hands on your stomach
- Breathe in slowly through your nose, pushing your hands out with your stomach. Imaging that you are filling your body with air from the bottom up.
- Hold your breath for three to five seconds and slowly exhale through your mouth or nose.

Once you get use to deep breathing you don't have to use your hands to check your breathing.

#### **Progressive Relaxation**

Progressive Relaxation is a technique for reducing anxiety by alternately tensing and relaxing your muscles. It is believed that you can reduce anxiety by learning how to relax muscular tension. Since many sleep problem are caused by an overactive mind or anxiety Progressive Relation can help you fall asleep.

- The technique involves tensing and relaxing muscle groups over the legs, abdomen, chest, arms and face.
- Lying down on your back start with your feet and work your way up to your head.
- Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds and then release for 10 seconds before moving on to the next muscle group.
- End by tensing your entire body for 10 second and then release.
- You will probably fall asleep before you complete this exercise.

*Call the Lawyer Assistance program for Free, Confidential Assistance  
At 410-685-7878 x3041 or 800-492-1964 x3041*

