Help Yourself Sleep Better

Don't go to bed until you are drowsy

Most people who have trouble sleeping go to bed before they are sleepy because they have been tired during the day and want to "catch up" on lost sleep time.

If they go to bed and aren't able to sleep, they worry about what is going on in their lives. They begin to dread the poor sleep they expect to have. Worries cause the body to be even more awake, and prevent sleep from happening easily.

Know the difference between fatigue and drowsiness

Go to bed when you are sleepy-tired, rather than just fatigued. Stay up for a while, enjoying a quiet activity, and head to bed when the time seems right.

It is best to wait until you are drowsy because it increases the chances of falling asleep, and it helps your body associate the bed with sleepiness. No one likes lying in bed awake, tossing and turning for long periods of time.

Get up at the same time each morning

It is important to maintain the body's time habits for the sleep-wake cycle (Circadian rhythm). Waking at different times causes sleep trouble even for people who usually sleep well.

Do not take naps

Napping disrupts the sleep-wake cycle, especially if it is more than 10 hours after you wake up. Napping at irregular times disturbs the sleep-wake cycle.

Try doing gentle exercises instead of napping. You should exercise regularly, but avoid exercising hard after 6:00 PM.

Reduce the use of caffeine, or quit drinking caffeine. Don't drink or eat anything that contains caffeine after 4:00 PM. Eat a light snack like crackers and milk to help you sleep better.

Talk to your doctor if your sleep continues to be a problem.

Adapted with permission from Dr. R. G. Clark's sleep hygiene handout.   Revised 4-29-15