



Patient being oriented to the sleep testing process. The technologist explains the application of each electrode and its purpose. Patients undergoing CPAP titration are also acclimated to the CPAP mask and machine and allowed to relax quietly at the bedside before their test is started.

GOT SLEEP?

It's not always about the mattress or pillow, but rather what you do before you go to sleep that counts.

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How many times has it happened to you? You're ready to go to sleep and just as your head hits the pillow, you're wide awake. You try counting sheep, reading or maybe sipping a warm glass of milk, but nothing helps. Relax, you're not alone.

Difficulty falling or staying asleep is a common problem. About half of Americans report sleep difficulties at least occasionally, according to National Sleep Foundation surveys. These woes - called insomnia by doctors - have far-reaching effects: a negative impact on concentration, productivity and mood.

Fortunately, there are many things you can do to improve your sleep, according to Co-Director of the Sleep Disorder Center at St. Jude's Hospital in Orange, Dr. Peter Fotinakes,

M.D. Accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the center provides comprehensive treatment of sleep-related disorders. It is designed to evaluate symptoms such as difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, daytime sleepiness or fatigue, snoring, breathing problems in sleep, restless leg syndrome at night, sleep terrors, and other troublesome behaviors associated with sleep.

And contrary to belief, we all don't need a full eight hours of sleep to help face the day. "Realistically, when you hear eight hours that's for someone that is 20 years old," Fotinakes said. "The number of hours of sleep that our bodies demand changes as we get older. For example, younger kids need 12 hours while a 60-year-old may only need six to seven hours of sleep. The amount of hours that someone needs depends on what leaves them fresh and alert during the day."

Before Bed

A lot of the sleep problems have to do with what you do before you get into bed, Fotinakes said.

He said that the first step requires some detective work. You'll need to examine your diet, exercise patterns, sleeping environment, personal habits, lifestyle and current concerns. As you begin to see the connection between, for example, what and/or when you eat and nights of poor sleep, you can develop your own good sleep plan.

Keep in mind that good sleep doesn't always just happen. Like a successful play, a restful night of ZZZs demands a strong director's hand and a stage set appropriately. "If you've been sleeping poorly for some time, you may have fallen into some bad sleep habits that reinforce your problem," he said.

All too often, we eat and drink without thinking about the effects. That afternoon cup of coffee seems like a good idea at the time. The dinnertime wine may appear a fitting celebration of the day's success. But that same drink can prove an enemy of restful sleep.

Coffee contains caffeine, as do many teas, chocolate and cola drinks. Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it has an alerting or wake-up effect.

"For some people, a small amount of caffeine early in the day can cause problems falling asleep ten to 12 hours later. Others have learned to avoid caffeine-containing drinks and foods within six hours of bedtime.

How you respond to caffeine is individual; it is also related to how much caffeine you have regularly. "For example, the more coffee you drink each day, the less powerful its effect as a stimulant," he said.

How do you determine caffeine's effect on you? Try eliminating caffeinated food and drink after lunch for a few weeks. Are you sleeping better? If so, you may have identified the culprit, Fotinakes said.

Caffeine isn't the only substance that can affect your sleep. Everything you eat



A technologist monitoring a sleep study. Each technologist monitors 2 patients per night. There are 16 channels of physiological data recorded on each patient, as well CCTV digital video recording.

can affect nighttime slumber. For example, tomato products and spicy foods give many people heartburn (as does eating too fast). What does heartburn have to do with sleep? Lying down makes heartburn worse, and heartburn itself makes falling asleep more difficult. Heartburn also awakens sleepers with middle-of-the-night discomfort.

"Drinking too much of any beverage can lead to more awakenings because of the need to urinate during the night. Also, the older we get, the more we experience these nighttime awakenings," Fotinakes said.

Try to restrict your fluids before bedtime to help promote an uninterrupted night's sleep. If the problem persists, talk to your doctor.

Watching what kinds of foods you eat before going to bed is also important. "It's not a good idea to eat heavy meals or greasy foods before you go to sleep," he said. "It's probably not wise to have ice cream either because it's high in fat." Another cause of sleep problems can be eating too much - of any kind of food. A heavy meal close to bedtime may make you less comfortable when you settle down for your night's rest. At the same time, going to bed hungry can be just as disruptive to sleep as going to bed too full.

Smokers and nonsmokers alike may

not be aware that nicotine, like caffeine, is a stimulant. And when smokers go to sleep, they experience nicotine withdrawal. Research suggests that nicotine is linked to difficulty falling asleep and problems waking up. Smokers may also experience more nightmares. Giving up smoking may cause more sleep problems at first, but the long-term effect on sleep and health is much better. So kiss those cigarettes goodbye.

The next place to look for the cause of a sleep problem is your exercise routine. Exercise can be a boon for good sleep, especially when done regularly in the afternoon and not too close to bedtime. If you don't exercise regularly, add good sleep to a long list of reasons why you should take up the practice.

Research suggests that exercise can help deepen your sleep, which means that you spend more time in deeper stages of sleep. During the lighter stages of sleep, awakenings are more common. Also, people who exercise may take less time to fall asleep than people who don't.

The time you go to sleep and the time you rise may sometimes seem beyond your control, but consistent bedtimes and wake times are advisable for those experiencing insomnia. If at all possible, "Establish a regular bedtime and wake time schedule," advises Fotinakes.

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If you find your thoughts turning to worries when bedtime approaches, keep a worry book by your bedside. Jot down a brief note about what's on your mind. Schedule time the next day to focus on the problem and a solution. Problems often seem smaller in the daylight. However, if problems persist, consider talking to your doctor or a psychotherapist.

Mattress Matters

Does your mattress provide the support you like? Do you wake with your back aching? Is there enough room for you and your sleep partner?

"It's not really about the mattress, but sure, if you have a saggy mattress that doesn't support the back, you may suffer aches and pain," Fotinakes said. "These problems might keep you from getting a restful sleep. There is some truth to having a good mattress, but I don't think you need a Cadillac mattress unless there are other problems. The same thing with

pillows — get what's comfortable for you. In other instances, if a mattress or pillow is uncomfortable they will cause pain and if it is intense enough, it will arouse and awaken you."

Other Tips to Sleep

If you don't fall asleep within 15 minutes, get out of bed. When you're sleepy, go back to bed. While in bed, don't dwell on not sleeping or your anxiety will increase.

Think relaxing thoughts: picture yourself soothed in a tub of hot water, or drifting to sleep, and relax each muscle.

Some sleep specialists say that anxiously watching the clock while focusing on how much time you have yet to sleep may actually cause insomnia. Try setting your alarm, then hiding it and your watch before you go to bed.

What about that glass of warm milk or counting sheep? Fotinakes said counting sheep breaks repetitive thoughts that

often occur when lying awake concentrating on sleeping. In other words, he said, counting takes the mind off of trying to fall asleep.

"Some people get so caught up in the counting, however, that it keeps them awake," he said. "I suggest 'stop-think' therapy. Say 'stop' out loud when the repetitive thoughts start, try to stop them in your head and make the mind go blank. The thoughts often return shortly afterward so you must repeat 'stop-think' several times for about 15 seconds. Keep doing this and eventually you'll drop off to sleep. The trick to falling asleep is not to think about it — just do it."

If your sleep problem persists, there may be an underlying cause that can be successfully treated or controlled once properly diagnosed. Sleep disorder centers are staffed by physicians and other medical professionals who specialize in helping people with persistent sleep problems. **IM**