



Counseling Center
PIKES PEAK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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COUNSELING
CENTER



Mental Health Support

for PPCC Students

Importance of Sleep



Importance of Sleep

- Essential to your physical health and emotional wellbeing
- Helps improve concentration and memory formation
- Allows your body to repair any cell damage that occurred during the day
- Refreshes your immune system, which in turn helps to prevent disease

Lack of Sleep Can Lead To

- Being more likely to suffer from depression, attention, memory problems, and excessive daytime sleepiness
- An increased sensitivity to pain
- Use of more prescription or over-the-counter sleep aids
- Many serious health problems, including an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, weight problems, and breast cancer in women

Amount of Sleep Needed

Requirements vary from person to person

Most healthy adults tend to require between 7.5 – 9hrs/night to function at their best

Focus on how you feel following a night's sleep, rather than a specific number of hours you spend asleep

Quality is as important as quantity



Sleep Problems

It's common to experience occasional sleep problems. However, if you experience any of the following symptoms on a regular basis, you may be dealing with a sleep disorder:

- Trouble falling asleep even though you feel tired
- Trouble getting back to sleep when awakened
- Not feeling refreshed after a night's sleep
- Feeling irritable or sleepy during the day
- Difficulty staying awake when sitting still, watching TV, or driving
- Difficulty concentrating during the day
- Relying on sleeping pills or alcohol to fall asleep
- Trouble controlling your emotions

Insomnia

Many cases of insomnia are caused by underlying but very treatable causes. While emotional issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression can cause insomnia, the most common causes are a poor sleep environment and poor sleep and daytime habits. Try to identify all possible causes of your insomnia. Once you figure out the root cause, you can tailor treatment accordingly.

- Are you under a lot of stress?
- Are you depressed? Do you feel emotionally flat or hopeless?
- Do you struggle with chronic feelings of anxiety or worry?
- Have you recently gone through a traumatic experience?
- Are you taking medications that might be affecting your sleep?
- Do you have health problems that may be interfering with sleep?

Common Causes of Sleep Problems

Poor sleep habits & sleep environment – Such as irregular sleep hours, consumption of alcohol before bedtime, and falling asleep with the TV on

Pain or medical illness - Such as a frequent need to urinate, arthritis, asthma, diabetes mellitus, nighttime heartburn, menopause, & Alzheimer's.

Medications – A combinations of drugs, as well as the side-effects of individual drugs, can impair sleep or even stimulate wakefulness.

Lack of exercise - If you are inactive, you may not feel sleepy or you may feel sleepy all of the time. Regular aerobic exercise during the day, at least 3 hours before bedtime, can promote good sleep.



Common Causes of Sleep Problems

Psychological stress or psychological disorders - Significant life changes like the death of a loved one or moving from a family home can cause stress. Anxiety or sadness can also keep you awake, which can, in turn, cause more anxiety or depression.

Sleep disorders - Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) and sleep disordered breathing such as snoring and sleep apnea.

Learned response - People with a legitimate cause for having trouble sleeping—after suffering a loss, for example—may lie in bed and try to force themselves to sleep. Eventually their bodies learn not to sleep. Even after your original reason for sleep disruption has passed, the learned response of not sleeping can remain.



Improve Sleep: Daytime Habits

- **Be engaged.** Social activities, family, and work can keep your activity level up and prepare your body for a good night's sleep. Try volunteering, joining a social group, or taking classes.
- **Improve your mood.** A more positive mood and outlook can reduce sleep problems. Find someone you can talk to, preferably face-to-face, about your problems and worries.
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercise releases endorphins that can boost mood and reduce stress, depression, and anxiety.
- **Expose yourself to sunlight.** Sunlight helps regulate melatonin and your sleep-wake cycles. Try to get at least 2hrs of sunlight a day. Keep curtains and shades open during the day, move your favorite chair to a sunny spot, or consider using a light therapy box to simulate daylight.
- **Limit caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine.** All are stimulants and interfere with the quality of your sleep.

Improve Sleep: Night-time Habits

- **Naturally boost your melatonin levels.** Artificial lights at night can suppress your body's production of melatonin, the hormone that makes you sleepy. Use low-wattage bulbs where safe to do so, and turn off the TV and computer at least one hour before bed.
- **Don't read from a backlit device at night (such as an iPad).** If you use a portable electronic device to read, use an eReader that is not backlit, i.e. one that requires an additional light source such as a soft bedside lamp.
- **Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and cool, and your bed is comfortable.** Noise, light, and heat can cause sleep problems. Try using an eye mask to help block out light.
- **Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.** By not working, watching TV, or using your computer in bed, you'll come to associate the bedroom with sleep alone, so when you get into bed your brain and body get a strong signal that it's time to nod off.
- **Move bedroom clocks out of view.** Anxiously watching the minutes tick by when you can't sleep is a surefire recipe for insomnia. Light emitted from a clock, telephone or other device can also disrupt your sleep.

Bedtime Routine

- **Develop a bedtime ritual.** A soothing ritual, like taking a hot bath or listening to music will help you wind down. Relaxation and stress management techniques, such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, take some practice but their benefits can be substantial.
- **Maintain a consistent sleep schedule.** Go to bed and wake up at the same times every day, even on weekends.
- **Block out snoring.** If snoring is keeping you up, try ear plugs, a white-noise machine, or separate bedrooms.
- **Go to bed earlier.** Adjust your bedtime to match when you feel like going to bed, even if that's earlier than it used to be.
- **Limit your use of sleeping aids and sleeping pills.** Many sleep aids have sideeffects and are not meant for long-term use. Although it may be tempting to continue using them, they are crutches that only address the symptoms not the causes of insomnia. In fact, sleeping pills can often make insomnia worse in the long run.
- **Combine sex and sleep.** Sex and physical intimacy, such as hugging and massage, can lead to restful sleep.

Keep Bedroom Sleep-Friendly

- **Keep noise down.** If you can't avoid or eliminate noise from barking dogs, loud neighbors, city traffic, or other people in your household, try masking it with a fan, recordings of soothing sounds, or white noise. You can buy a special sound machine or generate your own white noise by setting your radio between stations. Earplugs may also help.
- **Keep your room cool.** The temperature of your bedroom also affects sleep. Most people sleep best in a slightly cool room (around 65° F or 18° C) with adequate ventilation. A bedroom that is too hot or too cold can interfere with quality sleep.
- **Make sure your bed is comfortable.** You should have enough room to stretch and turn comfortably. If you often wake up with a sore back or an aching neck, you may need to invest in a new mattress or try a different pillow. Experiment with different levels of mattress firmness, foam or egg crate toppers, and pillows that provide more support.

Naps

People are biologically programmed to sleep not only for a long period in the middle of the night but also for a short period in the middle of the day.

Naps can enhance visual, motor, and spatial skills, and have even been shown to decrease the risk of coronary heart disease.

So, if you don't feel fully alert during the day, a nap may be just what you need. For many people, taking a brief nap can provide the needed energy to perform fully for the rest of the day. If you can, experiment with napping to see if it helps you.

Some tips for good napping:

- **Short** – Naps as short as 5 minutes can improve alertness and even memory. Most people benefit from limiting naps to 15-45 minutes. You may feel groggy and unable to concentrate after a longer nap.
- **Early** – Nap early in the afternoon. Napping too late in the day may disrupt your nighttime sleep.
- **Comfortable** – Try to nap in a comfortable environment preferably with limited light and noise.

Diet Tips

- **Limit caffeine** – Avoid caffeine (from coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate) late in the day
- **Avoid alcohol** – Don't use alcohol as a sleeping aid - it might appear to make you sleepy, but will actually disrupt your sleep
- **Satisfy your hunger** – Have a light snack such as crackers, cereal and milk, or yogurt, or warm milk
- **Avoid big meals or spicy foods** – Large or spicy meals may lead to indigestion or discomfort...try to eat a modest-sized dinner at least 3hrs before bedtime
- **Minimize liquid intake** – Limit what you drink within the hour and a half before bedtime

Exercise Tips

Exercise releases chemicals in your body that promote more restful sleep.

- **Endurance activities** - (Such as walking, swimming, or riding a bike) increase your heart rate and breathing to improve the health of your heart and circulatory system
- **Strength exercises** - Build muscle tissue and reduce age-related muscle loss
- **Stretching exercises** - Keep your body limber and flexible, allowing a greater range of motion

Studies have shown that participating in moderate endurance(aerobic) activity can have the greatest impact on improving sleep.



Reduce Stress

Stress and anxiety can easily get in the way of a good night's sleep. Everyone has worries and lists of things to do, but it is important to teach yourself to let go of these thoughts when it's time to sleep.

- Journal to record worries and concerns
- On your to-do list, check off tasks accomplished for the day, list your goals for tomorrow, and then let go for the night
- Listen to calming music
- Read a book that makes you feel relaxed
- Get a massage from a friend or partner
- Use a relaxation technique to prepare your body for sleep
- Talk with a friend or therapist about what is troubling you

Trouble Falling Back Asleep

It's normal to wake briefly during the night but if you're having trouble falling back asleep, the following tips may help:

- **Don't stress.** Try not to stress over the fact that you can't get back to sleep, because that very stress encourages your body to stay awake. Focus on the feelings and sensations in your body instead.
- **Make relaxation your goal, not sleep.** Try a relaxation technique such as deep breathing or meditation, which can be done without getting out of bed. Remind yourself that although they're not a replacement for sleep, rest and relaxation still help rejuvenate your body.
- **Do a quiet, non-stimulating activity.** If you've been awake for more than 15 minutes, try getting out of bed and doing a non-stimulating activity, such as reading a book, journaling, or listening to relaxing music. Keep the lights dim so as not to cue your body clock that it's time to wake up, and avoid TV and computer screens.
- **Postpone worrying.** If you wake during the night feeling anxious about something, make a brief note of it on paper and postpone worrying about it until the next day when you are fresh and it will be easier to resolve.

Talk to Your Doctor

If your own attempts to solve your sleep problems are unsuccessful, your doctor may be able to help with sleep problems due to:

- A sleep disorder
- Medication side-effects or interactions
- Medical conditions or illnesses
- Pain

Bring with you a SLEEP DIARY – where you keep track of your sleep habits, including alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine use, as well as medications, exercise, lifestyle changes, and recent stresses.



For more information on Sleep, please
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