

MCDOWELL COUNTY WELLNESS AND WELLBEING NEWSLETTER

SWEET DREAMS

FREE RESOURCES AND TOOLS

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

Did you know that 1 in 3 American adults don't get the recommended seven hours of sleep? While this might not seem problematic, consistently failing to get enough sleep can put you at risk of significant health problems. In fact, not getting enough sleep is linked to a variety of chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression and obesity. Moreover, failing to regularly get enough sleep can lead to chronic fatigue, which can increase the risk of productivity issues at work and distracted driving crashes.

TIPS FOR IMPROVING SLEEP HABITS

Eat nutritiously. Good eating habits can help you sleep better and feel energized all day. Also, avoid big meals right before going to bed.

Exercise regularly. This also helps your sleep quality and daytime energy level. Just be sure to avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime.

Avoid stimulants like caffeine before bed. Stimulants like caffeine and nicotine promote alertness, which can make it difficult for you to fall and stay asleep, so it's important to avoid them for three to four hours before bed.

Put the electronics away. Blue-light emitting electronic devices can prohibit you from getting a good night's sleep. To reduce the effects of these sleep-stealing devices, refrain from using them for at least an hour before bed.

Stick to a schedule, even on the weekends. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day to keep your body on a consistent schedule

SLEEP AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The personal electronic devices that help make your daily life easier may be doing the opposite in regard to your nightly sleep habits. If you're having a hard time falling and staying asleep, devices like your cellphone, TV and tablet may be to blame

The Negative Effects

Researchers at Harvard identified three main ways that using your phone, or any electronic device, before going to bed can derail your sleep schedule:

1. **Melatonin suppression**—The Harvard study revealed that those who used electronic devices before going to sleep had lower levels of the sleep-regulating hormone, melatonin. That's because the blue light emitted by electronic devices suppresses the production of melatonin, which controls your circadian rhythm—your body's natural sleep and wake clock.

2. **Later sleep onset**—The study also found that the amount of time it took to fall asleep was longer for those who used electronic devices than for those who didn't. If you're mindlessly scrolling through social media sites instead of reading a book or meditating, it's more likely that you'll have a harder time falling asleep.

3. **Reduced REM sleep**—Research shows that electronic device usage before bed results in a reduced amount of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep cycles. REM sleep is a vital component of our sleep patterns.

What Can You Do?

To prevent the harmful effects of electronic devices, there are a few steps that you can take, including:

- Check your device's settings for a "nighttime" mode, which adjusts the screen lighting to promote sleep.
- Refrain from using your phone for at least an hour before bed.
- Set your device's sound settings to "silent" so you won't be woken by texts or emails while you're trying to sleep.
- Try reading a book or meditating to relax before bed instead of using your phone or watching TV.

GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP WITH FOOD

Approximately 90 minutes before you want to fall asleep, make yourself a snack of roughly 200 calories from the items listed below. These sleep-inducing foods will help your muscles relax, quiet your mind and produce sleep-inducing hormones (serotonin and melatonin) to get you right off to bed.

Flaxseeds. These seeds are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which will brighten your mood if sadness or anxiety is keeping you from getting to sleep.

Bananas. These power fruits contain serotonin and melatonin, and the muscle relaxant magnesium.

Warm milk. This beverage contains tryptophan, which is sedating and calcium to help your brain use the tryptophan. Warm milk also has a calming effect and is comforting to drink.

Honey. The small amount of glucose in honey communicates with your brain to turn off orexin, a neurotransmitter that contributes to alertness. Place a spoonful in a bowl of oatmeal to head off to bed quickly.

Oatmeal with almonds. Oats contain melatonin, which is great for inducing sleep. Almonds contain a healthy dose of tryptophan and magnesium.

Whole-wheat bread and turkey sandwich. Whole-wheat contains insulin, which assists tryptophan in making its way to your brain. Once there, it is converted to serotonin to send you to sleep in no time. Turkey is the best-known food source of tryptophan. If you eat a slice of turkey on whole-wheat bread, you will be off to sleep because tryptophan works best on a fairly empty stomach with a small amount of carbohydrates.