

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep is a natural stage of rest that affects our daily function as well as our physical and mental wellbeing. Following a brain injury it is very important that you get a good restorative sleep every night to help your recovery. Lack of sleep and fatigue can increase all of your symptoms and slow down your progress.

Sleep hygiene refers to the practices, habits and environmental factors that influence sleep. Here are some suggestions to help you get a good night's sleep:

- ❑ Set up a routine time to go to bed and to get up each morning-and stick to it even on weekends! Consistency is very important in developing a good sleep-wake cycle. Most importantly always get up at the same time in the morning
- ❑ Engage in calming activities 30 minutes before going to bed
 - ❑ Avoid stimulating movies, books or exercise during this time;
 - ❑ Some people find a warm bath an hour or so before bed to be relaxing
 - ❑ Avoid eating a heavy meal immediately prior to bed. If you are hungry you might want to eat a light snack. Some people find drinking warm milk to be helpful.
 - ❑ Lie down when feeling sleepy
- ❑ Regular daily exercise can improve restful sleep. This includes stretching and aerobic exercise. Complete any exercise at least three hours before going to sleep
- ❑ Avoid alcohol and limit caffeine intake from any source (e.g. coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) in the afternoon and evening
- ❑ Extra sleep may be necessary in the days immediately following an injury. However avoid napping during the day if possible. If a nap is necessary, try to limit it to less than twenty minutes. It is better to have a nap earlier in the day (before noon) rather than later in the day
- ❑ Use your bed only for sleep and intimacy. It is not a place to watch TV, read or work on your laptop
- ❑ If you are unable to sleep for 20-30 minutes after retiring, get up and engage in a calm activity such as reading a relaxing book or listening to quiet music. Return to bed once you start to feel sleepy. Repeat this cycle until you fall asleep. Avoid lying awake in bed for long periods of time. You want to teach your body and mind that bed is a place to sleep with the goal of eliciting sleep as an automatic response when you retire for the night

- ❑ Minimize noise, light and temperature extremes during sleep with earplugs, window blinds, an electric blanket or an air conditioner. Even the slightest nighttime noises or luminescent lights can disrupt the quality of your sleep. Try to keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature neither too hot (above 75 degrees) nor too cold (below 54 degrees)
- ❑ Commit to trying these strategies for at least 4 weeks before deciding whether or not they work
- ❑ Some people find that combining good sleep hygiene with other strategies, such as deep breathing, meditation or visualization is useful in achieving a restful and restorative sleep

Other Suggestions

- ❑ Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone that is available as an over the counter drug. It may be helpful in restoring the sleep cycle for some people. Although it is available without a prescription you should talk with your Doctor before taking it
- ❑ If self-management strategies are not improving your sleep then you should talk to your Doctor about short-term medical management