[IMAGE]

Set the Stage for Sleep

By Editorial Staff

We're learning more and more every day about the power of a good night's sleep, and yet too many of us still don't achieve it on a regular basis. What can we do? Half the battle lies in how we prepare for sleep. Here are four ways to help ensure you fall asleep easily and wake up refreshed:

1. Set the mood: Light and noise are generally your enemies when it comes to falling and staying asleep. Your bedroom should be as dark as possible, and noise should be limited to sleep-promoting <u>white noise</u>, soft music, etc. Black-out curtains can help if you live in an urban (read: well-lit) area and/or your windows tend to let in moonlight easily. Set any music to a timer so it automatically goes off after a set period of time. These steps and others will enable uninterrupted sleep, the best kind when it comes to your health.

2. Cut-off time: Speaking of uninterrupted sleep, many people make the mistake of drinking too much water and/or other liquids to close to bedtime. Particularly with age, that can be a major sleep inhibitor. After all, when you're getting up to go to the bathroom multiple times during the night (and hoping your fall back asleep quickly), odds are you'll wake up feeling tired and altogether unrested. Solve this potential problem by stopping liquid intake at least several hours before bedtime and visiting the restroom a few times before bed.

3. Sleep mode: Technology is ruining sleep, pure and simple, by providing us with information overload at our fingertips. Too often, we watch TV in bed, tinker with our smartphones or tablets, or play video games right up until it's time to sleep. Unfortunately, your brain continues to process all that information for some time after you turn the technology off, making sleep difficult. Give yourself some quiet, pre-sleep time free of technology distractions before settling in for the night.

4. You are what you eat: And in this case, if you eat GI-disturbing and/or energy-elevating <u>foods</u> near bedtime, you'll be hard pressed to sleep comfortably. Avoiding caffeine is an easy call, but also think about greasy, fatty, sugary foods, which can keep your stomach churning through the night. Replace those foods with a soothing cup of decaffeinated tea and some walnuts or almonds, both of which have been shown to help promote sleep.

Think about it: How often do you fall asleep within 15 minutes of turning out the lights? How about this one: How often do you sleep through the night (at least six hours uninterrupted)? If you're not accomplishing either of the above, it's taking a toll on your health, particularly in the long term. Talk to your doctor about these and other ways to ensure a good night's sleep.

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