How to Get Better, Healthier Sleep

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"**I** have trouble falling asleep", "I sleep around midnight or 1am", "I feel tired during the day". Sound familiar? We all know a good night's sleep is important. How much and the quality of rest one has gotten can affect mood, behavior, academic/athletic performance, and overall health. However, poor sleep hygiene is very common, especially for our adolescents. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, teens need about 8-10 hours, but the average teen gets 7 hours or less each night!

What can we do? First, set up a sleep routine...

Our bodies are stimulated and processing information all throughout the day. It is important to give it some time to wind down. Set aside about 30-45 minutes every night for this routine. This can include a warm shower or bath, light reading, listening to calm music, meditation. If you like writing or art, spend some time journaling or drawing. **Avoid** using electronic screens (phone, computer, TV) for at least an hour before going to bed. The blue light emitted from the electronic screens mimics daylight. It can disrupt our sleep-wake cycle and decrease the natural production of melatonin. Melatonin is the hormone produced by the brain to regulate our circadian (sleep-wake) rhythm. So screen use can cause delay in feeling sleepy.

Consistent Bedtime is key!

Maintain a sleep pattern/schedule. Bed time and rise time should be around the same every day and shouldn't differ more than an hour for either one. This may take time to establish, especially if bedtime is usually very late. You cannot force yourself to be tired, but can gradually train your body to shift the sleep schedule to an earlier time. Set a goal for bedtime and every few days go to bed 15 minutes earlier until that goal is reached.

Consistency is key! This includes the weekend! Avoid trying to catch up on sleep missed during the week. It takes effort to train the body to create a regular sleep pattern. 4-5 days of routine and then a major change on the weekend makes it harder for the body to get into a helpful, healthy rhythm and reset for your regular weekday schedule.

Your bed is for sleeping...

Try not to do homework, watch TV, or other activities in bed. You want your mind to connect your bed with going to sleep. Keep the room comfortable, cool, quiet, and dark. Creating a sleep-friendly environment can make it easier to fall and stay asleep.

Healthy nutrition and exercise help!

Healthy meals and physical activity in your daily routine really help you get a good night's sleep. The sleep habits learned and put into practice now play a huge role on how you sleep as you get older. However, it is never too late to start. These tips are not just for our teens. Adults can benefit from them too!