

A Newsletter Dedicated to Helping You Take a More Active Role in Your Healthcare

Holiday Zzzz's Will Put You at Eazzze



November 2009

Holiday stress can mean less sleep. In fact, according to a recent Gallup poll, 76% of the adults living in the United States said they lose sleep during the holidays. Sleep is a natural part of everybody's life, but many people know very little about how important it is. Sleep is something our bodies need; it is not an option. While the exact reasons we need sleep remain a mystery, we do know that during sleep many of the body's major organ and regulatory systems continue to work actively. Some parts of the brain actually increase their activity dramatically, and the body produces more of certain hormones.

Below are some facts about sleep that may help you understand how important it is, even when your to-do list is a mile long.

- When fatigued, people are less productive and more prone to accidents.
- It is possible to gain weight from lack of sleep. This is because Leptin (a natural appetite suppressant) decreases and Ghrelin (a natural appetite stimulant) increases with lack of sleep. This gives you a craving for fatty, unhealthy foods that you wouldn't normally have.

- Inadequate sleep causes **decreases** in:
 - Performance
 - Concentration / Reaction Times
 - Consolidation of Information Learning
- Inadequate sleep causes **increases** in:
 - Memory Lapses / Mood Problems
 - Accidents and Injuries
 - Behavior Problems

Here are some tips to help you get more sleep...

- Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day – even on the weekends.
- Avoid exercising closer than 3 or 4 hours to bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine before bed.
- Don't take naps after 3 p.m.

- Relax before bed. Take time to unwind. Consider making a relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, part of your bedtime ritual.
- Take a hot bath before bed.
- Foster a good sleeping environment. Get rid of anything that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or a TV or computer in the bedroom.
- Get the right amount of sunlight exposure. Natural sunlight is key to regulating sleep patterns. Try to get outside for at least 30 minutes each day.
- Don't lie in bed awake. If you find yourself still awake after staying in bed for more than 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of being unable to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.

So, this holiday season make sure you take the time to get a good night's sleep. If you are regularly having difficulty sleeping, consult your doctor to find out if you may be affected by a sleep disorder.

Source: Adapted from National Institutes of Health. Your Guide to Healthy Sleep. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Accessed 2008.

The holiday season is a wonderful time - a time for family reunions, buying gifts, receiving gifts, eating too much dinner, going home for the holidays... the list goes on and on! But the season can also add to your stress levels.