MENTAL HEALTH MOMENT
SLEEP HEALTH

According to the CDC, a third of US adults report that they usually get less than the recommended amount of sleep. Getting enough sleep is crucial for people of all ages to stay in good health. Although there is a common tendency for many to prioritize other things above sleeping habits, many people know that they should be getting better sleep and wish to have better sleep as well. This month's Mental Health Moment discusses the recommended amount of sleep, common problems that interfere with sleep, as well as tips for improving your sleep health.

What kinds of sleep problems can people have?

- Trouble falling asleep – lying in bed for more than 30 minutes without being able to fall asleep
- Trouble staying asleep – waking up frequently during the night
- Early morning waking – waking in the early hours of the morning before you need to get up but not being able to fall back asleep
- Behaviors that interfere with sleep – such as snoring, grinding your teeth, restless legs, sleep walking and breathing problems
- Sleeping too much or for too long
- Excessive sleepiness or urge to nap during the day
- Excessive fatigue or lack of energy

How Much Sleep Do You Need?

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the Sleep Research Society recommend the following amount of sleep for each age group:

Age Group		Recommended Hours of Sleep Per Day
Newborn	0–3 months	14–17 hours (National Sleep Foundation)[1]
Infant	4–12 months	12–16 hours per 24 hours (including naps)[2]
Toddler	1–2 years	11–14 hours per 24 hours (including naps)[2]
Preschool	3–5 years	10–13 hours per 24 hours (including naps)[2]
School Age	6–12 years	9–12 hours per 24 hours[2]
Teen	13–18 years	8–10 hours per 24 hours[2]
Adult	18–60 years	7 or more hours per night[3]
	61–64 years	7–9 hours[1]
	65 years and older	7–8 hours[1]

The Importance of Sleep:
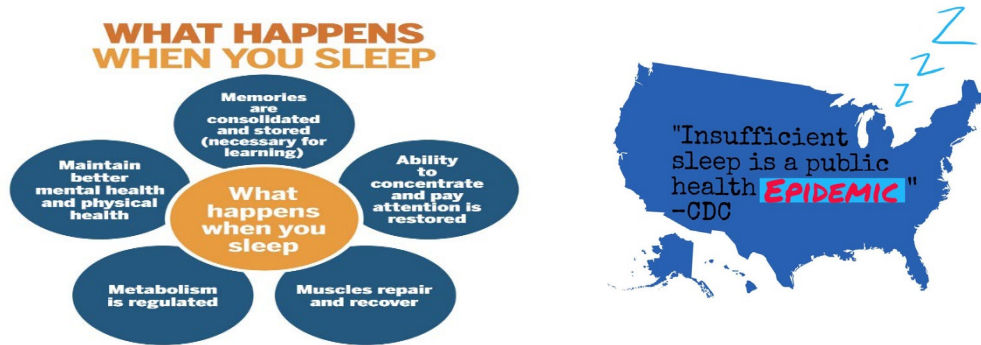
Tips for Getting a Good Night's Sleep:

Tip #1 Avoid caffeine close to bedtime

Some people have problems sleeping when they have consumed too much caffeine. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate are common sources of caffeine for most people. Some medications for colds, allergies, pain relief, and appetite suppression also contain caffeine, so keep your sleep health in mind when deciding when to take these medications.

Tip #2 Avoid alcohol close to bedtime

Although it might feel like drinking alcohol helps you fall asleep faster, alcohol can disrupt and affect the quality of your sleep. Drinking alcohol before bedtime can also cause breathing problems and jerky arms and legs.

Tip #3 Unwind before attempting to fall asleep

Read a book, do crosswords or Sudoku, take a bath or shower, listen to calming music or try meditating or a relaxation exercise. Screen time is stimulating, and the blue light emitted by devices can affect your sleep. It's best to avoid watching TV or being on your phone or other devices for at least 30 minutes before bed.

Tip #4 Exercise a few hours before bedtime

Research shows that people who exercise regularly have deeper sleep. Exercising can give you a boost of energy, so it's best to get your exercise in at least four hours before bedtime.

Tip #5 Follow a routine

Try to sleep the same sleep and wake schedule every day – including weekends. Keeping a consistent schedule helps your body get into a routine and more naturally prepare itself for daily activities such as waking up and falling asleep.

Tip #6 Avoid naps if you experience sleep problems

If you are experiencing problems with sleep, consider cutting out naps to see if you are better able to fall asleep and stay asleep throughout the night. In all cases, it's best to keep naps short, around 30 minutes at most. If you often feel so tired that you can't get through the day without a nap, it's a good idea to talk to a doctor, as regular fatigue can be a sign of another health problem.

Tip #7 Avoid going to bed too hungry or too full

Eating at regular times throughout the day will help with a good night's sleep and help keep you on a more consistent routine. Try to avoid eating a large meal at least two hours before bed.

Tip #8 Get up if you do not fall asleep within half an hour

Leave your bedroom and do something relaxing like listening to soft, calming music, taking a bath, drinking a warm, caffeine-free beverage. Try to relax and focus on the calming activity you are doing.

Tip #9 Make your bedroom comfortable and only use it for sleeping

Try to not spend much time in your bedroom outside of sleeping. Don't use your bed for watching TV, working, or studying. Make sure your room is not too hot or too cold –try to find a temperature that makes you feel relaxed.

Tip #10 Challenge the belief that you can't function without a perfect night's sleep

When you can't sleep, you might check the clock and worry about getting through the upcoming day. This increases anxiety and makes it harder for your body to feel relaxed enough to fall asleep. Turn the clock away from your view. Remind yourself that you can likely do your daily activities even when you feel tired, unless this would pose a danger to yourself or others.

Sources:

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