

Need ZZZ's?

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I love the long dog days of summer but in the Pacific NW we might not experience consistent sun until July or August so I'm eternally grateful for at least getting a little extra light. I enjoy waking up to sun streaming into the room and birds happily chirping away. Except... I must admit to sometimes struggling with falling asleep at a reasonable hour when the daylight hours are longer thus making the experience of "bird chirping/waking in the sunlight" not quite

the same. Unfortunately many others struggle with getting enough sleep all year round. Insufficient sleep is now considered a public health epidemic in the United States with 50% or more of Americans struggling to get enough sleep each night. The Institute of Medicine estimates that hundreds of billions of dollars are spent annually on medical costs that are directly related to sleep disorders. Recent research has shown there are links to heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. Insomniacs are also at higher risk for depression, increased pain perception, lowered immunity, and hormone imbalances. Never mind the fact that these individuals are tired, irritable, anxious, and find it hard to think straight without a more than healthy daily dose of caffeine to get them through their day.

There are different forms of sleep disorders starting with primary insomnia which has no other obvious cause but may have developed from another chronic issue. There's secondary insomnia with its root being in another

problem such as an illness or acute stress. It's broken down further into transient, short-term, or chronic depending on the length of time. The issue may be with falling asleep, staying asleep or both. There are individuals who fall asleep but aren't able to get into the restorative sleep phases due to a variety of problems including sleep apnea, alpha wave intrusions, and upper airway resistance syndrome. Even though they are "sleeping", they still wake feeling horrible in the morning. And whether it's the chicken or the egg, chronic stress frequently plays a primary role in the insomniac's life.

Struggling with sleep may have some fairly simple answers such as drinking caffeine or alcohol too late in the evening or an acute, temporary stressor. But unfortunately it's often much more complicated and difficult to treat. Prescription sleep medications designed for short term use are frequently utilized on a long term basis, have potentially scary side effects, and don't address why sleep is disrupted. In naturopathic medicine, one of our tenets is "treat the cause". Treating the cause includes looking at an individual's lifestyle, potential hormone imbalances, and other things that might play a role in the problem along with appropriate testing which may include a referral for a sleep study. I was taught by one of my mentors that the more complicated the case, the simpler the treatment. So on that note, here are a few tried and true sleeping rules:

- 1) ***Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, no later than 11 pm at night.***
The more restorative sleep occurs earlier in the night so staying up until 2 am and sleeping in isn't going to give you the same level of rest as going to bed earlier.
- 2) ***Go to sleep in a quiet, dark room.***
The darkness stimulates production of melatonin, an important sleep hormone. The more light in the room, the less melatonin.
- 3) ***Avoid television, computers or anything that induces stress at least an hour or more before bed.*** Televisions and computers emit blue light which inhibits production of melatonin. And stress and physical exercise later in the evening increases cortisol levels, a stress hormone which lo and behold, decreases production of melatonin.

This is a big topic and there is much more to say but alas I've run out of space. So for now, get back to the basics and the doctors at True Health Medicine, PC are always here to assist you further in getting that golden night's sleep.



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