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Updating Evidence-Based Patient Education Resources for Sleep: Sleep Hygiene and Benzodiazepine Discontinuation

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SLEEP HYGIENE

What is Sleep Hygiene?

Sleep hygiene is the idea that *you* can have control over how well you sleep. Changing some of your behaviors and the conditions in your bedroom may help you get better sleep at night.

Good Sleep Hygiene Habits

Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Research shows that adults who get less than 7 hours of sleep are more likely to suffer from heart attack, stroke, cancer, and diabetes¹. Insomnia is also a predictor of mental health problems like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide².

Stick to a routine bedtime and wake time every day of the week, including weekends. This helps your body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) stay on track.

Sleep in a dark, quiet room. A dark room helps signal to your brain that it is nighttime and therefore time for sleep. Consider blackout curtains to decrease the amount of light coming through your windows. If you live in a loud environment, run a fan or a white noise machine to disguise sounds.

Give yourself enough time to sleep. Create a large enough sleep opportunity for yourself. When you decide your bedtime, take into account how long it takes you to fall asleep. If you want to sleep 8 hours each night but you take 30 minutes to fall asleep, your sleep window should be 8 ½ hours spent in bed.

Relax before bed. Don't take the worries of your day to bed with you. Calming down your nervous system can help signal to your body that it is time to sleep. Try meditation, deep breathing, light stretching, or reading right before bed to get your body into relaxation mode. If you find your thoughts racing, try writing down your worries in a journal and addressing them the next day.

Exercise. Regular exercise may help you fall asleep faster. Although it is likely best to exercise no later than 4-6 hours before bed, exercise at any time of day is better than nothing and will likely contribute to healthy sleep.

Things to Avoid

Bright lights from electronic devices around bedtime. Bright lights from cell phones, laptops, tablets, and televisions send a signal to the part of the brain that regulates

day/night cycles. When you use bright lights before bed, your brain thinks it is daytime and you may have trouble falling asleep.

Caffeine. Try to stop consuming caffeine by noon each day. This way, most of the caffeine will be out of your system by the time you lay down to sleep at night. The more obvious caffeine sources are coffee, tea, and energy drinks, but sometimes people overlook the less obvious ones like soda and chocolate.

Alcohol. Alcohol can make you sleepy initially, but ultimately leads to light sleep and can cause you to wake up throughout the night.

Nicotine and other stimulants. These chemicals can activate your brain and body at the exact time you are trying to shut it down for the night.

Other Resources

Websites with high-quality sleep hygiene information:

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene>

www.sleepassociation.org/about-sleep/sleep-hygiene-tips

https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/sleep_hygiene.html

www.sleepeducation.org/essentials-in-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits

Phone apps for meditation and relaxation:

Mindfulness coach (entirely free)

Calm (free trial available)

Headspace (free trial available)

References

¹CDC - data and statistics - sleep and sleep disorders.

https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/data_statistics.html. Published May 2, 2017. Accessed February 8, 2021.

²Daniel J. Taylor, Kenneth L. Lichstein & H. Heith Durrence (2003) Insomnia as a Health Risk Factor, Behavioral Sleep Medicine, 1:4, 227-247, DOI: 10.1207/S15402010BSM0104_5