

## Sleep Awareness

---

If you find yourself tossing and turning and counting sheep on a quest for elusive sleep, you are not alone. Approximately 70 million people in the U.S. have a sleep problem. In fact, the majority of American adults don't get the recommended 8 hours of sleep a night.

What is preventing you from catching those zzz's? Stress, lifestyle habits, shift work, jet lag and the environment (lighting, noise level, and temperature) are just a few examples of things that may contribute to sleep disturbance. Some medications, such as steroids, decongestants and certain medications used to treat asthma, depression and high blood pressure may also impair sleep. Discuss your medications and possible side effects with your healthcare professional. Medical conditions such as menopause, pregnancy, Restless Legs Syndrome, chronic pain and sleep apnea can also interfere with sleep. Sleep apnea is an easily treated, but often unrecognized medical condition characterized by snoring and interrupted breathing which causes brief awakenings and daytime sleepiness. See your healthcare professional if you suspect sleep apnea or if your sleep problems last more than a week or are interfering with your ability to function.

Insufficient sleep may cause more than frequent yawning and dark circles under the eyes—it can be downright dangerous. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an estimated 100,000 automobile accidents and 1,500 fatalities a year are related to fatigue. Chronic lack of sleep has also been associated with depression, memory impairment, decreased immune response, increased stress and decreased productivity. Following are some tips to help improve your sleep:

- Establish a regular bedtime and wake time—even on weekends
- Avoid/limit the use of caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine
- Don't eat large meals or drink large amounts of fluids close to bedtime
- Create a bedroom conducive for sleeping—avoid working in the bedroom, or having televisions, computers, and other electronics in the room
- Exercise regularly but do so at least 3 hours before bedtime
- If you can't sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing--such as reading or putting a jigsaw puzzle together

Be sure to check with your healthcare professional before taking any medication for sleep, including over-the-counter preparations.

References: <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleeplibrary/index.php?secid=&id=53>  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003210.htm>

The contents of this article and referenced websites, such as text, graphics, images, and other material contained on the site are for informational purposes only. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Reliance on any information provided by these websites is solely at your own risk. APS is not responsible for the contents of any "off-site" web page referenced from this server. © APS Healthcare<sup>sm</sup>, Inc., Silver Spring, MD. All rights reserved. In the Phoenix area, contact 602 274-1401 to make an appointment with an EAP counselor.