

Good Sleep - Healthy Sleep - Key to Alertness

Why Sleep is essential?

Sleep is vital for our good health. Uninterrupted sleep for 7 to 8 hrs in night is as much essential as air, water and food. It restores our physical health, energy and mental functions including memory, concentration, work performance and getting along with people around us. Its role in maintaining physiological and psychological equilibrium in our body and mind is indispensable for our survival.

Effects of poor sleep and lack of sleep

Poor sleep quality and prolonged sleep deficiency impact our physical and mental health adversely, resulting in –

- decreased physical coordination, such as, poor response
- decreased mental functioning, such as, poor attention, reduced concentration, memory, creativity and slower reaction times
- Impaired judgement and reaction time
- increased risk for mood disorders, such as, irritability, depression and anxiety
- increased risk for some diseases, such as, high blood pressure, heart diseases and diabetes
- increased risk for accidents
- reduced functioning of the immune system
- increased risk for weight gain and obesity
- a lower life expectancy

The seriousness of these effects depends on the extent of sleep deprivation or sleep loss. Since these effects can be more pronounced in the shift workers, due to their altered work – rest cycle, not in harmony with natural sleep – wake cycle, they need to take special care for having a good sleep when they are off from duty, so that they remain healthy – both physically and mentally.

Some strategies to have good sleep

Good sleep habits are essential for a good sleep. Following strategies may help those who have difficulty in having good sleep.

- 1) Make it a habit to go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- 2) Do not take naps during the day to make sure that you are tired enough for sleep at bedtime.
- 3) Keep your daytime routine the same even if you could not sleep well in the night.
- 4) Physical exercise in the morning and some light exercise in the afternoon is good for sleep, but do not do vigorous exercise 4-5 hours before your bed time.
- 5) Sleep when you feel tired and sleepy.
- 6) Do not be on bed just awake and never keep waiting and waiting in order to fall asleep.
- 7) If you are not falling sleep, do not keep watching timepiece again and again.
- 8) If you are unable to sleep even after lying down for 20 minutes or so get up, relax your muscles, clam your mind and then go to bed and try sleeping again.
- 9) Avoid playing indoor game or watching an exciting movie reading some interesting book, if you are feeling difficulty falling asleep – these may be stimulating and interesting and may fade away the sleep urge.
- 10) Avoid coffee, tea, coca cola etc. that contain caffeine and also cigarettes and tobacco products that contain nicotine for at least 6 hours before going to bed. These stimulants interfere with your ability to fall asleep.
- 11) Avoid alcohol - it is relaxing and may help induce sleep, but it interrupts the quality of sleep.
- 12) Avoid using sleeping pills. They induce dependence and interfere with good sleep.
- 13) Relax yourself and do a few breathing or meditation exercises to induce sleep.
- 14) Use bed for sleeping and not for watching TV, eating, reading, doing some work on laptop etc.
- 15) Use clean and comfortable bed and the bedroom with fresh air circulation to sleep. There should not be light or noise or other things such as mobile phone, call bell etc. that may interrupt your sleep.
- 16) Eat healthy, light and balanced diet. Avoid late meals, heavy meals and plenty of liquid in the evening.
- 17) A glass of lukewarm milk may also prove to be a good sleep inducer.
- 18) A drop in body temperature induces sleepiness. Have a hot bath 60-90 minutes before going to bed. It will increase your body temperature and then with gradual decrease of temperature you will feel sleepy.
- 19) Manage your worry - excessive worry can make it difficult to fall asleep.
- 20) Understand your sleep problem using a sleep diary

If you need more advice **Feel Free to Contact Executive Director/Traffic, Psycho-Technical Directorate, Research, Designs and Standard Organisation (Ministry of Railways), Manak Nagar, Lucknow - 226011** at solutionsatpsychotech@gmail.com.

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