

Sleep Awareness, Insomnia and Sleep Disturbances

Did you know that March 3-9 is National Sleep Awareness Week? Sleep awareness is becoming more of a concern for our society, as we continue to work longer and sleep less. Yet research shows that it's a common misconception that sleep needs decline with age. So what's keeping us awake?

Sleep architecture – changes in our sleep patterns – occur as we age. The older we get, the more we spend in lighter stages of sleep rather than deep sleep. Sleep-related problems are vast, from sleep apnea to bruxism – that annoying nocturnal teeth-grinding – to insomnia, which is Latin for “no sleep.”

A patient recently fell into a deep sleep during a massage and asked for pointers that would keep him more alert during future sessions.

- Allow enough time for sleep (recommended amount of eight hours)
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine within four hours of bedtime
- Keep your bedroom quiet and comfortable

- Exercise earlier in the day and not close to bedtime.
- Make sure your room is quiet and dark and your bed is comfortable.
- Get up and go to bed at the same time every day.
- Limit your caffeine consumption and nicotine use. And eat dinner at least two to three hours before bedtime-it's more difficult to fall asleep if your body is still breaking down the food you ate. A light snack just before bedtime, however, may be helpful.
- Exercise regularly. Physical activity done early in the day may promote deeper, better quality sleep. Too-vigorous exercise just before bedtime, however, may delay sleep. If you have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep:
- Don't toss and turn for longer than half an hour: Get up and do something calming such as reading.
- Develop a relaxing presleep ritual: have a glass of warm milk or herbal tea; read or take a warm bath.
- Get treatment for any medical problems that may contribute to sleep troubles, such as sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome.

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Sleep is crucial to maintaining your health. Without it, you increase your susceptibility to an astonishing array of health problems, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and depression.

We eat well and exercise in order to keep our immune system up. One of the most efficient ways of killing those best efforts are to not get enough sleep. Statistics Canada reported that 47% of Canadians choose to sleep less to add time to an already long day. It estimated that 3.3 million Canadians over age 15 suffer from insomnia. Holy sleeping disorders! That's an eye-opener.

Next month will look at breast cancer, a disease that strikes one in nine Canadian women. Send me your questions to brittafrombach@gmail.ca.

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