

## **Struggling to Sleep? Try these behavioral and cognitive tips and tricks to improve your zzz's**

### **Sleep is a common problem**

#### **It's not just you**

About 40% of us are sleep deprived – meaning our daily schedule and obligations get in the way of us sleeping enough. And then there are 20% of us who can't get to sleep even when we try.

#### **Lack of sleep is unhealthy**

We're much more likely to suffer from anxiety or depression if we aren't sleeping well. We're also more likely to put on weight, leading to diabetes.

#### **Poor sleep, poor work performance**

Beyond our health, our work performance also suffers, meaning we're less productive. If we're not getting as much sleep, we either miss time at work, or we're unproductive when we're at work.

### **Sleep more soundly tonight**

#### **Behavioral tips**

##### **Keep yourself in the dark**

Light at night interferes with the production of the hormone melatonin, making it more difficult to get to sleep and stay asleep. Try blackout curtains or blinds to help keep your bedroom dark, or try an eye mask. If you get up during the night, avoid switching on bright lights.

##### **Skip the nightcap**

Alcohol may help you fall asleep initially, but it also interferes with restorative sleep. This means that you're more likely to have disrupted sleep later in the night, which will lead to feeling unrefreshed when you wake up.

##### **Put down the phone**

Avoid using your smartphone or tablet in bed – not just because it can keep your mind active and awake, but also because the blue light they emit is known to interfere with the hormone melatonin, making it harder to get to sleep and stay asleep.

##### **Keep your cool at night**

The ideal temperature for sleep is around 65°F. If you get too hot, you may get restless. If you get too cold you may struggle to drop off or have bad dreams.

## **Cognitive Tips**

### **Put your worries to bed**

Put the day to bed before you put yourself to bed. Think about the day, plan tomorrow and set your mind at rest. If you're fretting about how much you have to do, write down a realistic "to do" list before you go to bed.

### **Set aside time to wind down**

Set aside 60-90 minutes before bed to stop working, mentally switch off and prepare yourself for sleep. Plan your routine – but don't be too rigid or inflexible... it's a time to relax!

### **Practice relaxation**

People with sleep problems often have difficulty relaxing but it can be helpful to see it as a skill, requiring training and practice. Try a technique called Progressive Relaxation: lying in bed, slowly tense and relax each of your muscles in turn whilst breathing slowly and deeply. Think of the word "relax" every time you breathe out.

### **You can't force yourself to sleep!**

Even when you have limited time to sleep, the reality may be that you aren't ready for bed yet. Trying to force yourself to sleep may make you more anxious and less likely to sleep. Only go to bed once you feel sleepy. And don't forget, the number of hours sleep you need is as individual as your shoe size. **In fact, sometimes a shorter sleep may mean a better quality sleep.**