

# Sleep

One thing we all wish we had more of and can't seem to get enough of – not money – **SLEEP!** Sleep is an important cornerstone for our body's recovery, rehabilitation and rest. Yet, we often find ourselves in "**sleep debt**"; sacrificing sleep to use that additional time elsewhere. However, "sleep debt" is not that easy to get out of. When we *think* that we can make up our sleep *later*, to compensate for sleep deprivation right *now*, we mess with our internal clock. We should be deliberate and purposeful in making sleep a priority.

According to the National Sleep Foundation:

*"One of the vital roles of sleep is to help us solidify and consolidate memories. As we go about our day, our brains take in an incredible amount of information. Rather than being directly logged and recorded, however, these facts and experiences first need to be processed and stored; and many of these steps happen while we sleep. Overnight, bits and pieces of information are transferred from more tentative, short-term memory to stronger, long-term memory — a process called "consolidation".*

Practicing sleep hygiene can help. These tips are easy to implement and if done daily can help improve your overall sleep.

- ✓ **Set and keep a consistent bedtime and waketime.** *Even weekends.* Our bodies run on a hormonally-mediated day/night cycle called the circadian rhythm, which tries to "guess" when we eat, exercise, and sleep. If your sleep schedule varies, your circadian rhythm can't adequately prep your body for sleep; on a similar note, **NO NAPS > 15 minutes**.
- ✓ **Create a pre-bedtime routine.** Do the exact same things, in order, every night before you get into bed; you're conditioning your body to recognize it's sleepy time, so after a week or so of consistency you'll notice you start to become *really* tired toward the end of the routine.
- ✓ **Cut down.** Alcohol, tobacco, & caffeine impair sleep quality by increasing body temperature, physiological activity, or both. Use minimal alcohol/tobacco within 2 hours of sleep, and no caffeine within 6 hours. On that note, try to avoid big meals, exercise, and/or technology use within 2 hours of sleep—you've got to give your body and your brain time to wind down!
- ✓ **Play it cool.** Set the right "mood" in the bedroom: cool (temperature), dark, and quiet. You should also reserve the bed solely for sleep and *\*passionate\** activities; reading or watching TV in bed confuses your brain as to what the bed is actually *for*...and how it should act!
- ✓ **Visualize.** Paying attention to anxious thoughts sparks neural *beta waves*, which prevent you from drifting off to sleep. Counting sheep, a mathematical function, also does the exact same thing! If you want to facilitate transition to the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of sleep (*alpha waves*), try visualizing yourself in the most comforting or relaxing environment you can think of—for me, it's a white-sand, clear-blue-water beach—and stay there, even when aberrant thoughts try to butt in. It takes practice and persistence, but over time you'll become more adept in teaching both your mind and body to relax in a timely fashion!

If you've tried the above, and haven't seen your sleep improve, it might be worth a conversation with your healthcare provider.

Questions? Contact the ART at [363ISRW.363.363ISRW@us.af.mil](mailto:363ISRW.363.363ISRW@us.af.mil) or (757) 764-9316