

SHUT-EYE

Let's talk "shut-eye". A good night's sleep is a powerful resource. We spend a third of our life sleeping and it's no wonder, because this repairing cycle is vital for preparing new pathways and enhancing learning and problem solving skills. Simply put, a good night's sleep helps your brain work better and prepare for the day ahead.

Your circadian rhythm (sleep/wake cycle) is programmed to work in line with the body's responses to light and dark.

This circadian rhythm is controlled by what is called the Suprachiasmatic Nucleus or SCN or, often called the "master clock". It is located in the hypothalamus and made up of approximately 20,000 nerve cells. The National Institute of General Medical Sciences state that, "Circadian rhythms can influence sleep-wake cycles, hormone release, body temperature and other important bodily functions. They have been linked to various sleep disorders, such as insomnia. Abnormal circadian rhythms have also been associated with obesity, diabetes, depression, bipolar disorder and seasonal affective disorder".

National Sleep Foundation recommends:

- 1) Establishing a sleep routine
- 2) Take a walk outside to expose yourself to the sun or bright lights if sun exposure isn't possible
- 3) Limit or turn off all electronic devices up to 3 hours before bed, as the stimulation interferes with your circadian rhythm and can interrupt that good night's sleep your body so desperately needs.

An approximation of sleep hours per age group can be viewed [here](#). Remember this is a guide only.

The natural sleep/wake cycle can be disrupted by many factors. Stress, for example, raises the body's natural responsive mechanisms to environmental factors that are perceived threatening on some level. Stress can be very disruptive to obtaining a good night's sleep.

A nutritional deficiency can also contribute to a sleepless night. Eating very late or eating foods that irritate your body can disrupt your sleep/wake cycle too. Pain and tension in the body can cause you grief when you are trying to relax enough to drift off. Your posture may be contributing to the pain or tension you're experiencing.

I have mentioned a few factors here that can contribute to a sleepless night. Sometimes, it isn't just one particular aspect of your life that is out of balance, there may be several areas of your life that can seemingly act in concert adding to the overall stress or tension that is keeping you from a sound sleep.

Patients who see me for Anxiety or Stress, for example, find it difficult to get a good night's sleep, "I just can't relax", some say.

Whilst a patient may visit with the intention to "fix it", it is important to review other areas of life that could be contributing to why they aren't able to receive that important night's sleep. I simply wouldn't be doing my job if I only looked at their sleeping cycle.

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