

## Sweet Dreams

Up to one third of the population have difficulty getting or staying asleep. For menopausal aged women that number may be closer to one half. Most adults require 6 to 9 hours of sleep a night to stay alert during the day. Insufficient sleep can affect mood, ability to concentrate and motivation as well as causing fatigue, muscle pain and tension. But before you run to your doctor or pharmacist for a sleeping pill, it may be helpful to reassess your “sleep hygiene”. Follow these simple steps to ensure that you get the sleep your body craves.

- Keep a schedule: Try to get up and go to bed at the same time everyday. Sleeping late on the weekends actually confuses your body.
- Incorporate exercise into your daily schedule, even if it is just a short walk. You will fall asleep easier and stay asleep longer. Be sure to exercise earlier in the day however. Too much strenuous activity in the evening can keep you awake.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine close to bed. Caffeine should be avoided for up to 7 hours prior to bed (and this includes chocolate, cola and energy drinks and even some over-the-counter pain relievers and cold medications). Alcohol may make you sleepy initially but makes for a restless night, leaving you feeling unrefreshed. Nicotine is often overlooked when it comes to sleep disturbances but it actually decreases sleep duration.
- Avoid eating a large, heavy meal before bed. A snack consisting of protein and carbohydrates will help to promote serotonin production and cause drowsiness.
- Lower the room temperature: Lower temperatures tell your body it’s time to sleep.
- Reserve the bedroom for sleep and sex only!
- Take some “me” time. Learn relaxation techniques, listen to soothing music, or take a warm bath.
- Don’t work late, look at your computer screen or watch TV right before bed. The lights from the screen are enough to reset your wake/sleep cycle. The content of the TV show, such as disturbing news or violence can also cause difficulty falling asleep.

If all of these measures still don’t make you sleepy, visit your doctor or pharmacist for medication options to getting your “zzzzzz’s”.