

"I can't sleep at night. The business climate is still stressful, even if things seem like they're getting better. I worry about how to keep each client happy, manage cash flow, what we're going to be doing for business next year, etc. As we've cut back staff, more lands on my plate. My mind keeps turning over the things I have to do, and how to keep the business moving forward. Any suggestions?"

Losing sleep over the business is a common complaint among business owners. Even when things start to look better, it can still be a stressful time. Add to that the challenges of changing seasons, different sleep patterns as we age and not enough time in the day to get everything done.

Striking a Balance

Getting enough sleep on a daily basis is crucial to optimum functioning. Sleep is a part of our body's and mind's recovery and healing process. Our adrenal system reportedly does most of its recovery from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. We need sleep time to process emotions, stress and memories, as well as to heal our bodies.

It's hard to be perky and alert if you're feeling sleep deprived. Many people get more irritable and aggressive when they're tired. Reflexes get slower, decision-making gets clouded. Tired bodies get sick more easily. And as anyone who has gone without enough sleep for a few days knows, the more tired we are, the more difficult it gets to think and come up with clear, bright ideas.

The average amount of sleep needed is eight hours, but individual needs vary, most typically from needing six hours a night for some, to 10 for others. As we age, typically we need fewer hours of sleep. However, research also shows that if we are given extra hours in bed, we'll learn to sleep longer - although longer sleep may actually lead to a shortened lifespan. There seems to be a balance between not enough sleep, which can result from anxiety and an over-full plate, and too much sleep, which can be a sign of depression and withdrawal.

Sleep Tight

Here are some suggestions to help you get a good night's sleep.

Go to bed every night at the same time, preferably by 10 or 10:30 and get up every day at the same time

Replace caffeine with exercise.

Exercise earlier in the day, not right before bed.

Sleep in a cool room. The body doesn't sleep as well when it's hot; but wear socks to keep toes warm since they're furthest from the heart and most likely to get cold, which can also wake you up.

Try taking a hot shower, then letting the body cool off before hopping into bed.

Drink warm milk - increases melatonin and tryptophan, both of which facilitate relaxation and sleep.

Read a book before turning out the lights and avoid TV, which stimulates the brain too much.

Recognize that most people's sleep cycle includes periods of deep and shallow sleep; resist the temptation to wake up fully in the middle of the night as the body goes through a REM cycle.

Many people report waking up around 2 or 3 a.m., mind racing; practice training your mind and body to go back to sleep. Keep a journal by the bed, record any thoughts for a few minutes, then turn out the lights and tell your mind and body it's time to go back to sleep.

Quiet the mind and body through meditation.

Avoid sugar several hours before bedtime as it tends to stimulate the body.

Stop drinking fluids when bedtime approaches.

Consider black-out drapes.

Get enough sunlight to stimulate hormone production; change lighting in the office to full spectrum fluorescent bulbs

Looking for a good book? Try "The Harvard Medical School Guide to a Good Night's Sleep," by Lawrence Epstein and Steven Mardon.

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