

# HEALTHFUL TIPS

## Sweet Dreams



**W**ith study after study validating the theory that a lack of sleep contributes to weight gain, the value of a good night's sleep cannot be ignored. Most of us need about eight hours of sleep a night to function at our best. Here are some ideas for you to consider in improving your nightly sleep habits:

- Sync with your body's circadian rhythm (natural sleep cycle) by keeping a regular bedtime, for a more restful sleep. Try not to alter this on the weekend. You should be able to get up without an alarm if you are getting enough sleep.
- Get your bedroom environment ready. Eliminate as much noise as possible. Avoid sleeping with the TV, computer or radio on. Use white noise or earplugs to cover unavoidable sounds like airplanes, dogs, and traffic. Light interrupts the circadian rhythm so keep your bedroom as dark as possible with window shades. Keep your room cool and well-ventilated. Don't forget to make sure that your pillow and mattress are comfortable.

- Develop a bedtime routine. Just like with children, a regular routine lets our bodies know that it is time to unwind and get ready for sleep. Turn off the television. The noise, light and stimulation don't help your body to unwind. Light reading, listening to quiet music, writing in a journal, straightening your bedroom, or taking a warm bath are all activities that can help to signal your body that it is just about time for sleep.

- Avoid alcohol, excessive fluid intake, heavy meals, greasy foods and spicy foods in the hours before bed. Keep caffeine for the morning—even early afternoon consumption can impact your nightly sleep.

- Have a light snack as part of your bedtime routine—yogurt and fresh fruit, a small bowl of cereal and milk, half of a sandwich, or a cup of no-added-sugar hot cocoa.

- Engage in regular exercise in the morning or early afternoon to promote a restful night's sleep.

- Manage stress, worry and anger throughout the day. Use relaxation techniques such as deep cleansing breathing exercises, visualization, meditation, or progressive

muscle relaxation. You can find free relaxation exercises online. If emotions are keeping you from a good night's sleep, consider making these relaxation exercises part of your bedtime routine. You may want to keep a pen and paper by your bed to jot down reminders or concerns—then give yourself permission to let them go until the morning.

- If you wake up during the night, stay in bed and try taking a few deep breaths to help ease you back to sleep. Don't get up and eat or drink—you'd be training your body to wake for these rewards. If you are unable to sleep after 15–30 minutes, a quiet activity like reading may help you to relax.

- Have a morning routine to help your body move into its active daytime phase. Open the shades to let the sunshine in, turn on the lights, and walk around to get oxygen to your cells.

- Avoid napping during the day. If you feel sleepy, get up and gently move around. Engage in an activity. Don't sit for long periods of time without movement breaks.