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### **Make the Most of Your Nap!**

Sleep problems lasting more than a few weeks can affect mood, concentration, and quality of life, so be sure you are aware of resources for coping with sleep problems. You can use these resources on your own or call to schedule an appointment at Dick's House for coaching on how to improve the quality of your sleep and to discuss any related concerns.

One intervention that may help you feel less sleepy is to trial a mid-afternoon nap. Napping can improve alertness, performance and creativity even for people who are not sleep deprived. Here are a few tips on how to get the perfect snooze:

1. **Best time to nap:** The best time to nap depends on when you wake up but for most people the early afternoon is most effective. When humans are left to our own devices we tend to sleep once for a longer period at night and once for a shorter period in the afternoon – it's human nature!
2. **Time it right:** Studies have tested a wide range of nap times, but for most individuals it seems around 20 minutes of sleep is best. Longer naps can cause "sleep inertia" or a period of grogginess and reduced performance caused by waking in the middle of a deep sleep.
3. **Get a wake-up call:** Set an alarm to take the pressure off and know you are going to wake up at the right time.
4. **Find your napping happy place:** For the perfect nap, you want to find a dark, quiet place to lie down. Consider an eye mask, ear plugs or white noise to help tune out disruptions. Calming yourself with meditation techniques like breathing and visualizations (see below) may also help you nap efficiently.
5. **Consider a "nappuccino":** Having a cup of coffee just before your nap can help you wake up more alert. It takes caffeine about 20 minutes to take effect – just about the time your nap ends. (Remember no naps or coffee less than four hours before you plan to go to sleep for the night).

If these tips don't work for you (if you can't fall asleep or don't wake up alert) you might have to skip the midday option and make sure you're getting enough sleep during the nighttime stretch. If you have any difficulty falling asleep at night (or have prolonged night waking) you should avoid naps.

#### **A FEW ADDITIONAL SLEEP TIPS:**

1. Get up at about the same time every morning, including weekends. This may be even more important than going to bed at a regular time (which is still a good idea!).
2. Go to bed only when you are feeling sleepy. Use the bed for sleep and sex only. Don't watch TV, work or read in bed. If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, get out of the bed. Go back to bed only when you feel sleepy again.
3. Limit caffeine to 1 – 2 beverages a day, no later than 4 hours before bedtime. Avoid using alcohol as a sleep aid (it will degrade the quality of your sleep). Don't eat a heavy meal within 2 hours of bed, but try not to go to bed hungry.

4. Establish a relaxing pre-sleep routine before bed. Practice natural relaxation techniques (eg. deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation). The “Mind Shift” app may help if you tend to feel anxious at bedtime, or consider trying a boring podcast with the “Sleep with Me” app. Check out options for muscle relaxation, guided imagery, meditation and more at <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/downloads.html>
5. Avoid electronics and screens for at least 30 minutes before bed. Try “F.lux” (free app) on your computer to minimize blue light exposure which can interfere with sleep. Orange glasses can also help to block blue light and improve sleep.
6. Avoid lights and noise in your room if possible. Don’t let your phone or alarm clock face you (or position them on the other side of the room). Consider blackout shades or an eye mask if light is a problem in your room. Maintain a comfortable room temperature. Consider a white noise app if noise is interfering with sleep (“White Noise Ambience Lite” and “Sleep Pillow Sounds” are both good apps with free versions). You can also consider ear plugs if ambient noise is a problem.
7. Regular physical exercise helps promote sleep and overall well-being but avoid vigorous exercise too close to bedtime. It is important to have light exposure during the first 1 – 2 hours that you are awake to support health circadian rhythm. Outdoor light is particularly helpful.

These are just a few of the resources available for sleep. Remember that even small changes can add up to big differences in your quality of life. Please let us know if you would like additional information or have any questions about these suggestions.

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