



# ightstraight

The Guide to Better Sleep and Health

Spring 2009

## The Art of Sleep: Relax!

Sleep, like living well, is an art. Many people take sleep for granted, but being well-rested is one of the surest keys to good health and happiness. There are many elements to getting a good

and are now being taught in leading medical schools.

There are also a whole host of holistic treatments to help you sleep well.



Many of you have already done some version of deep breathing, either in yoga class or in a sports practice warm-down. Lie on your back and inhale slowly through your nose, progressively filling your chest from the lower part upwards. You then hold your breath for one or two seconds and slowly release. It's as simple as that. Just repeat this exercise until you feel like you are about to fall asleep. ■

### < Try This!

night's rest, including the quality of your mattress, your bed's location in your room, your diet and exercise habits, and your mental attitudes toward sleep itself.

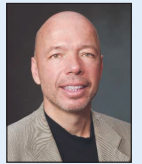
"Holistic health" refers to a philosophy of medical care that considers the physical and mental aspects of life to be closely interconnected and equally important in treating ailments. Holistic health and medicine are increasingly used in mainstream medical practice as part of a broad view of patient care

Just remember your homework begins long before bedtime. For any relaxation technique to work, it's best to avoid certain activities during the day which can contribute to your feeling tense or excited at night. These include drinking caffeinated beverages, exercising too close to bedtime, and taking long naps during the day. Once you discover the art of relaxation for yourself, you'll be well on your way to good health through better sleep. ■

of us have difficulty with in this day and age. Like all art forms, it takes practice to learn the techniques that work for you.

## Dr. Robert Oexman

answers your  
 sleep questions



## Ask the Oexpert

**Q:** I thought a firm mattress was the best kind to buy, but I'm tossing and turning all night. I just can't get comfortable. My old mattress was worn in the middle, but it didn't offer the support I need. What's the answer?

— Kathy V., *Sleepless in Georgia*

**A:** Excellent question, and a very common one at that. In our research facility, we monitor and measure how the environment impacts sleep. We have learned that the sleep surface is the most important factor in the cause of sleep disruption. In the old days, when

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**I**nsomnia affects more than 70 million Americans, and one in six adults considers sleep problems a serious issue in their lives. Yet many of us are hesitant to bring sleep issues up with a doctor. In our workaholic culture, people brag about how little sleep they're getting because it is seen as the sign of a motivated and efficient person. But the fact is that most people's bodies rack up a "sleep debt" without a good eight straight hours of sleep a night. And that debt can be hard to pay down: sleep deprivation has been linked to an increased risk for depression, obesity, high blood pressure and lower productivity at work. It should be considered a serious health problem. Those

co-workers who are so proud of getting only five



# insomnia

hours of sleep a night might need to spend longer at the office to get the same amount done.

Insomnia doesn't just mean an inability to fall asleep at night. If you wake up frequently, have trouble getting back to sleep, wake up too early or just feel fatigued when you wake up, you could have insomnia. Short-term factors like a move, the loss of a job or other major life stressors can bring on a bout of insomnia. Chronic or longer-lasting problems can also be caused by emotional conditions or ongoing physical discomforts. Talking to your doctor is always the right first step. But the following good sleep habits can also get you on the path to eight restorative hours of peace:

## KEEP THE BEDROOM ABOUT SLEEP

It's easy to fudge this one, but sleep hygiene is important. Your body and

**Chronic sleep deprivation makes you prone to errors at work. It slows your reaction time and impairs concentration. It can put you in danger if you doze off while driving, and it makes all kinds of accidents more common.**

As many new mothers know, lack of sleep can make you short-tempered and cranky with those who need your patience most.

mind make powerful connections and associations that can be hard to break. If you're not sleeping well, you may already associate your bed with anxiety and the stress of watching the minutes tick by on your alarm clock. You want to try to train your body to associate the bed, and even the bedroom, with rest and rest alone. Keep the bed for sleep and sex only. That means no reading in bed (not even US Weekly!). Don't do work or any other wakeful activities in the bedroom—keep computers and TVs in another room. If you can't sleep, get out of the bed and read until you feel sleepy (go back to that US Weekly in the living room). If you tend to let your mind churn through your to-do list while trying to sleep, try writing down everything on that list before you go to bed (but make sure to keep the list safely on your desk).

Make sure your bedroom is geared towards a good night's rest. Darkness is important: get blackout shades, or a sleeping mask. Make sure it's not too hot and not too cold. Add whatever elements make you more comfortable.

### TRY BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENTS AND RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Behavioral therapies and relaxation techniques include restricting your time in bed to however many hours you are successfully sleeping (even if it's only three or four). That way, whenever you are in bed, you're asleep. Then you can extend your time in bed by fifteen minutes a night until you reach eight straight hours. The point is to train your body to associate bed with sleep and nothing else. However, this is a harder technique to stick with, and it might be worth consulting a sleep

professional or other resources before you try it.

### HAVE A ROUTINE

Take a bath, listen to music in a comfy chair, read a book or do something that helps you unwind every night. Go to sleep at the same time every night, and get up at the same time in the morning. If you can't sleep, try not to nap during the day. You're trying to get your body on a sleep schedule, and naps interrupt those circadian rhythms.

### AVOID CAFFEINE, NICOTINE & ALCOHOL

If you can't avoid alcohol and caffeine completely, avoid caffeine after noon and avoid alcohol after early evening. Coffee and cigarettes stay in your system much longer than you might expect. Alcohol might put you to sleep at first, but it wakes you up

when it leaves your system later on, disrupting those rhythms.

### EXERCISE EARLY AND OFTEN

As with so many other health concerns, exercise can make things better. Regular exercise has proven in some studies to be as effective as sleeping pills in curing insomnia. But it's important not to exercise late in the day or in the evening. Give yourself three or four hours to unwind from a work-out before you try sleeping.

### CONSIDER YOUR MATTRESS

A quality mattress that provides support and comfort could be the key to unwinding at bedtime. If you are sleeping on a mattress more than 6 or 7 years old, consider purchasing a new, supportive mattress that will help you sink into stress-free slumber. ■

## A Mystery Since the Dawn of Time

Yawn

As far as we can tell, humans have been yawning since they came into being. The scientific jury is still out on why we yawn, what causes it, or if it holds any important function. However, the limited research that has been done on the subject does show that there may be more to yawning than meets the eye. We typically attribute yawning to being fatigued, bored, or sleepy, but there are theories out there offering different explanations. Here are the three most common theories:

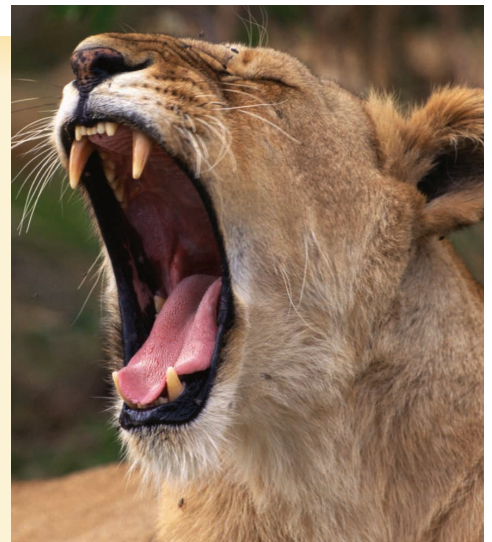
**The Physiological Theory** When we yawn, we release built-up carbon dioxide by drawing in more oxygen. The more people around, the more carbon dioxide is being produced, which could explain why we tend to yawn in groups. However, why doesn't exercising cause us to yawn? When our bodies are active, they need greater amounts of oxygen. Yet, we don't typically yawn frequently while jogging. When this theory was tested at the University of Maryland, it was found that giving people extra oxygen did not decrease frequency of yawning, and yawning was not prevented by lower levels of carbon dioxide.

**The Boredom Theory** Traditionally, we think of yawning as something we do when bored or tired.

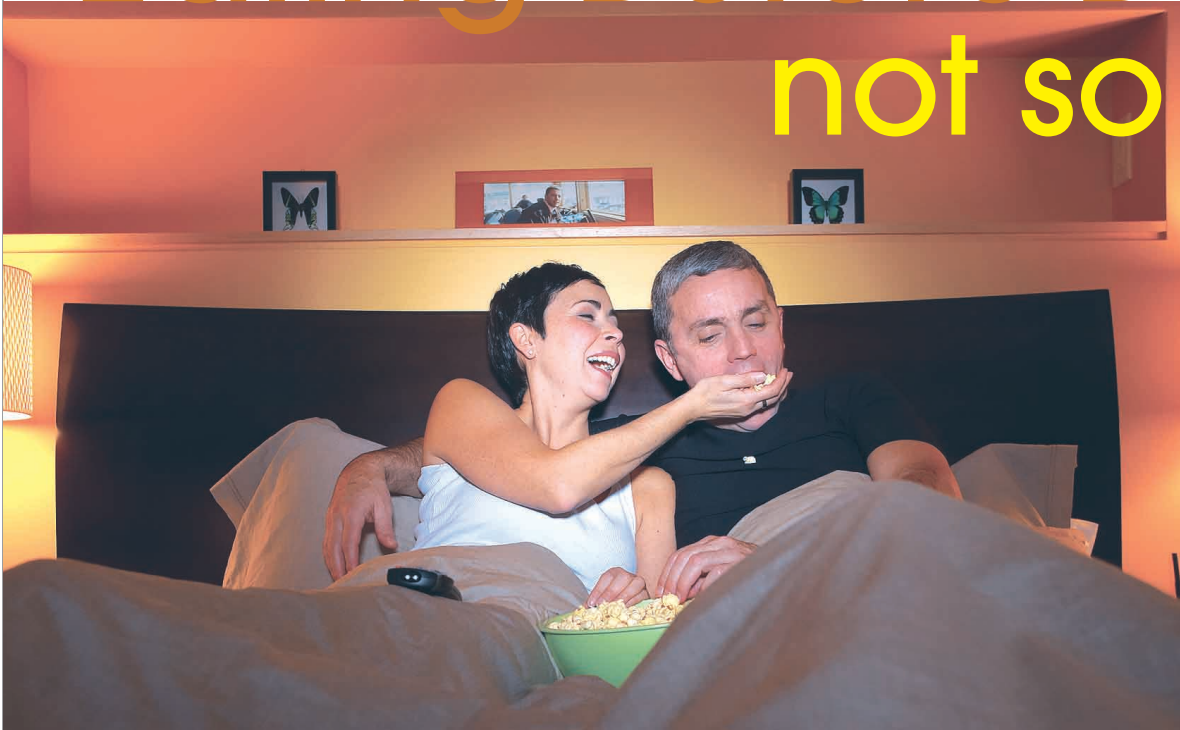
However, there are phenomena that dispute this theory. One is the fact that Olympic athletes tend to yawn right before competing. Considering they are more than likely peaking in energy at the time, the boredom theory doesn't seem to apply.

**The Evolution Theory** Because yawning causes humans (and other mammals) to show their teeth, it is possible that we began yawning to intimidate and show our dominance over others. A related theory suggests that early man evolved to use yawning as a signal for a change in activity.

Unfortunately, our brains are still mostly a mystery to us, so discovering the cause of yawning could be a long time coming. One thing we do know is that we aren't the only animals who do it—dogs, cats, and even fish yawn. Is it some form of communication, then—or, are our household pets just bored with us? We may never know. ■



# Eating Before Bed... not so bad



key to snoozing soundly. Carbs make tryptophan more available to the brain by producing insulin, which clears our blood of amino acids that could block tryptophan from reaching the brain.

While the biological details can be complex, knowing that what you eat can affect how sleepy or awake you are is a definite advantage, whether you're trying

to sleep better or need to be more alert during the day. We've learned how high-carb, low protein meals can help you sleep at night. In the morning, eating a meal high in protein with a moderate amount of carbohydrates can help you hit the ground running. ■

### Caffeine and Sleep

Obviously, following any of these sleep-inducing foods with a cup of coffee or cola is a bad idea (unless you plan to stay up most of the night watching infomercials). On average, it takes about 6 hours for caffeine to clear your system. So, time your caffeinated drink binges wisely to keep your body from unwelcome nightly jitters.

 A photograph of a blue and white ceramic coffee cup filled with dark coffee, sitting on a matching saucer. The cup has a decorative pattern of white swirls and dots.

As far as sleep quality is concerned, midnight snacks aren't always a bad idea. Just make sure you eat the right stuff.

A number of sleep articles and tips for getting a good night's sleep recommend not eating too close to bedtime. Our bodies will remain active in digestion, producing energy when we're trying to sleep. However, there are some foods that may actually aid you in getting some shut-eye.

Around the holidays, we're all familiar with the story of turkey dinners being the cause of after-dinner napping. That's not just an old wives' tale—but, turkey isn't the only food that can have this effect. Other foods, such as eggs, pork, seafood, and rice can cause the same sleepiness as our favorite holiday poultry. This is because they all contain high amounts of a substance called tryptophan.

Tryptophan is an amino acid the body uses to make serotonin and melatonin, substances that slow the

brain down and help us sleep. Eating these substances alone, however, may not do the trick. Protein-rich foods contain the amino acid tyrosine, which typically causes the brain to perk up by keeping tryptophan from the brain.

### Carbs Are a Friend to Sleep

Eating carbohydrates with tryptophan-containing foods is the chemical

### Snooze Foods

Chow down on these high-in-tryptophan foods to get some much needed shut-eye. Just remember to include carbs when you reach for the protein!

- Eggs, cottage cheese, cheese, milk, soy milk, soy beans, tofu, meats, seafood, poultry, whole grains, beans, rice, hummus, sesame seeds, hazelnuts, peanuts

# TAKE THE DRAG OUT OF JET LAG

It can go by the names of desynchronization, dysrhythmia, dyschrony, or jet syndrome, but most of us know it as jet lag. Anyone who travels long distances by plane has undoubtedly felt its effects, but would be hard-pressed to explain what it really is. You can get jet lag simply by crossing one or two time zones. You feel tired or crabby during your trip, and can't get back to sleep at night or wake up on time when you get home. Jet lag is actually a physiological condition which occurs with an alteration in a person's circadian rhythm, or sleep cycle, which is based on light and dark.

As your body experiences daylight and darkness contrary to its accustomed rhythms, your body clock goes haywire. Your usual rhythms that tell you when you should be eating and sleeping no longer function correctly,

and hormone levels and body temperature rhythms no longer correspond to their usual cycles of sleeping and waking. Jet lag occurs because the body needs time to realign these rhythms.

While some people think of jet lag as a mere nuisance, it can lead to other, more serious problems such as anxiety and insomnia, so it's important to take it seriously. Symptoms can include dehydration, loss of appetite, nausea, upset stomach, headaches, sinus irritation, disorientation, grogginess, sleep deprivation, mild depression and irritability.

The speed at which the body readjusts itself is based on the individual. So while it may take several days for some people to readjust to a

new time zone, others seem to experience little disruption to their body's natural patterns and adapt within a day. The general rule for most of us is one day of adaptation per time zone.

So what should you do to recover quickly from jet lag? Good sleep habits, relaxation, moderate exercise, and a balanced diet can all help. However, since individuals experience jet lag differently, no one remedy can be prescribed. Women, for example, tend to be more susceptible to jet lag due to the higher levels of estrogen in their bodies. Here are some pre-flight, in-flight, and post-flight suggestions to help combat jet lag:

## The Scoop on Eye Goop!

**Why do we get eye crust when we're asleep but not when we're awake?**

- >>> Because we don't blink while we're asleep. Our eyelids act like windshield wipers. During the day all sorts of stuff like dust, tears, sweat and oils gets in our eyes, and our eyelids wash them away when we blink.
- >>> Since our eyes are closed when we're asleep, all that stuff builds up and dries out near that fleshy bump in the corner of the eye called the caruncle.
- >>> When your eyelid is shut, your eye is warmer, which allows bacteria to grow. When your eyelid is closed you don't make tears that protect against bacteria buildup; so, your body sends bacteria-eating cells to your eye. Eye goop also includes the chemical remnants of all that bacteria fighting action. ■

## SEVEN TIPS TO HELP ADJUST TO YOUR DESTINATION

- TIP #1 SHIFT YOUR SLEEP-WAKE CYCLE** to match that of your destination. Start several days before departure, changing at the rate of one hour per day.
- TIP #2 RESET YOUR WATCH AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR FLIGHT** to start adjusting to the time zone of your destination.
- TIP #3 WHEN IT IS NIGHTTIME AT YOUR DESTINATION, SLEEP ON THE PLANE.** Use eye masks, earplugs and headphones to help diminish light and noise.
- TIP #4 WHEN IT IS DAYTIME AT YOUR DESTINATION, STAY AWAKE.** Read a thriller with the light on and the window shade open, or cruise the aisles.
- TIP #5 DRINK PLENTY OF WATER.** The air on planes is extremely dry, and dehydration can worsen the effects of jet lag.
- TIP #6 AVOID ALCOHOL AND CAFFEINE WHILE FLYING.** They increase dehydration.
- TIP #7 EXERCISE** as much as you can on the flight during waking hours: stretch, do leg lifts, get up and walk down the aisles.

# WHY YOUR Mattress Matters

the more you know, the better you'll sleep

Your mattress matters. If you're waking up stiff, or less than refreshed, your aging mattress could be part of the problem. Sags and lumps don't provide your body with good support. But that doesn't mean you have to choose a hard bed for the sake of your back. When it comes to mattress selection, comfort is king (or California king)—and there are different kinds of comfort for you to choose from.

Consumer Reports recommends that if you are over 40—meaning your body tolerates less pressure (like taco mattress pressure)—you should replace your mattress after five or seven years of age. Here's the good news: when it comes to choosing a new mattress, your own comfort is the single most important factor in selecting a new sleep surface. For a while, the popular theory was that firmer was always better. But now, most experts agree that you have to really like your bed, even while making sure it offers good support to your spine. No need to stick boards on top of your box spring if you don't go for that board-like feel. If you have back trouble, you should talk to a doctor about whether a firmer mattress might help. But even if it might, you can usually still opt for a firmer mattress underneath a softer top, like a pillow top, which many consider the height of luxury.

In the end, many sleep experts will advise you to always choose the firmer of two otherwise very comfortable mattresses. But whatever your firmness preference, you should look forward to climbing into bed at night.

Good mattresses are often expensive, but price isn't everything. Some

mattresses are made with longer lasting materials, or more springs, but the most important factor is to take the time to find something you really like. When shopping for a mattress, remember that you're making a decision that's going to affect your sleep for years to come. If you fall in



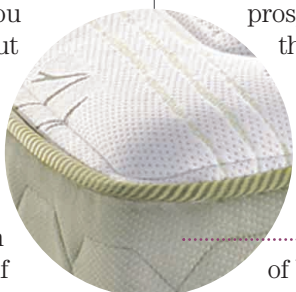
love with something top-of-the-line, break down how much you're spending per night over the course of seven years, and it won't seem like such a huge expense.

In order to find a mattress that will truly enhance your sleep: Take your own sweet time. Spend at least 15 minutes lying on the bed you're thinking of buying, if not longer.



That's right, in the store. With your shoes off. Just politely ask the salespeople to give you some time alone with your

prospective purchase. Try each of the positions you sleep in for minutes at a time. It's better to do this at the end of the day, when your body is worn out and most like the tired set



of bones you will actually drag to this mattress at night.

Shop with your partner. Make sure you have enough room to turn over and spread out. Make double-sure that the mattress is a good firmness for both of you, and also that it's comfortable when both of you are on it. ■

**PILLOWTOP** an extra layer of comfort padding added to the surface of a mattress

**MEMORY FOAM** deeply contoured high density foam which conforms to your body

**SOY** a natural core made from all natural soybean oil

Dr. Robert Oexman

answers your sleep questions

## ask the Oexpert

*continued from page 1*

manufacturers made very soft mattresses, someone placed a board underneath the mattress and discovered that the firmer support seemed to feel better. Over the years, mattresses became firmer and harder, thinking that was support. But hard is not at all supportive. When a person lies flat on a hard mattress, we can see that the small of the back is not supported, and that bridge develops very high pressure underneath the shoulders and hips. This added pressure may result in sleep disturbances. We find that people who experience high pressure "toss and turn" a lot more at night, and that actually fragments their sleep and doesn't allow them to get the restful night of sleep that they need. Just as your foot has an arch that needs to be supported by proper footwear, so does the back. And just as your tennis shoe has a cushion to reduce pressure, so should your sleep surface. To sleep well, you need a surface that provides support and pressure reduction. Try a mattress with a firmness that supports the arch in your back, fills the small of the back, and cushions the pressure points at the shoulders, hips and knees. With proper support and cushioning, you should get a good, restful night's sleep.

**Dr. Robert Oexman**  
Vice President of Strategic Development and Research, Sleep To Live

Dr. Oexman oversees the Sleep to Live Institute's research of sleep and how the environment impacts sleep. As a doctor of Chiropractics and member of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, Dr. Oexman lectures on the topic of sleep both in the U.S. and internationally.

## PILLOW TALK



## Is your Pillow a pain in the neck?

**Picking out a pillow is more important than you may realize.**

When you're trying to get a better night's sleep, never underestimate the power of the pillow. The right pillow is essential to giving proper support to your neck and shoulders. Just remember, not all pillows are created equal.

The main thing to keep in mind when choosing a pillow is your own comfort—if a pillow doesn't feel comfortable, it's not right for you. Here are some things to consider:

**Too high or too low**—A too-high pillow can cause undue strain on the neck and the shoulders by forcing the head forward (if sleeping on your back) or unnaturally to the side. Breathing problems such as snoring can also occur. On the other hand, neck muscles can also be strained if a pillow is too flat.

**Too soft or too firm**—The perfect pillow will alleviate pressure points by molding to your individual shape. A too-soft pillow may not provide enough support to keep the body aligned during sleep. Yet, a too-firm pillow can actually cause more pressure points rather than alleviate them.

Most pillows may be reasonably firm when new, but will become softer and flatter over time. Pillows that have become pancakes should be replaced as soon as possible! ■

**S**noring can keep you up all night and ruin your sleep cycle. This, in turn, can affect your performance at work, as well as everything from your day-to-day temperament to your sex life. It can also affect your partner's sleep and lead to sleep deprivation, narcolepsy, anxiety and stress. Few things are a bigger turn-off than a partner who snores.

While statistics on snoring vary, as many as 30 to 50% of adults snore, and the percentage increases with age. One survey of over 5,000 Italian adults identified habitual snoring in 24% of men and 13.8% of women. This increased to 60% of men and 40% of women among those aged 60 to 65 years. Snoring can also be a sign of a more serious condition, such as sleep apnea. And although many—if not most—people

snore at some point in their life, most people don't know what causes snoring or how to stop it.

**Why do people snore?** Simply put, snoring is caused by irregular airflow in your respiratory system. This may be caused by a host of factors. Throat weakness can cause your throat to close during sleep. Tension in your jaw muscles can lead to your jaw falling into a distorted position. Finally, fat deposits located in and around your throat can lead to the clogging or obstruction of your nasal passageway. The result is that same sound we all recognize immediately.

**M**any people believe that snoring is simply something that you just have to put up with, but there are many simple things you can do to prevent it. Lifestyle changes can help: For someone who is significantly overweight, losing weight can make a difference since it reduces your fat deposits everywhere, including in your throat and respiratory organs.

The quality of the mattress you sleep on and the position you sleep in may adversely affect your sleeping and thus lead to snoring. Try sleeping on your side for a few nights and see what happens; this change in position

often clears your throat passage and will diminish if not eliminate snoring. In order to avoid rolling back into the wrong position again, try placing a pillow against your back. Raising your head is another option, whether you're lying on your back or in order to support your head while you're lying on your side. Nose clips are yet another option—they dilate the nostrils and enhance airflow.

If your snoring problem persists and becomes so severe as to disrupt your day-to-day routine or your relationships, other remedies are available. There are dental appliances that can help correct or get rid of snoring. Called mandibular advancement splints, they

# snoring

## the not-so-silent sleep stealer

push the lower jaw forward slightly, and thereby pull the tongue forward. This clears up your throat and makes breathing at night easier. If you decide to try such a device, it's recommended that you seek out a dentist specializing in sleep apnea dentistry who can give you a prescription.

**S**plints have been proven to be effective in reducing snoring and sleep apnea in cases where the apnea is mild to moderate. Possible but rare side effects include gradual movement of the teeth, temporomandibular joint disorder, excess salivation and gum irritation. Over-the-counter mandibular advancement splints provide the same benefits if fitted correctly.

A more drastic option to get rid of snoring is surgery. One of the most common procedures goes by the ungainly name of uvulopalatopharyngoplasty. During this procedure, the surgeon removes tissue at the back of the throat (including the uvula and pharynx) in an attempt to widen the airway. This is an invasive surgery, and there are risks of adverse side effects, so it's only recommended in extreme cases.

Whatever the case, snorers are best advised to seek medical advice to assess their treatment options. ■

**SLEEP IS A LUXURY** for most American men and women, and sleepiness is a fact of our modern lives. We long for sleep, but we're up at all hours. Blame it on Thomas Edison. Along came the electric light bulb, and we had daylight 24 hours a day.

**N**ow, we also work more—averaging 9.5 hours at work and 4.5 hours of chores each week at home. We trade sleep for relaxing in front of the television, videogame or computer. Coffee and other sources of caffeine get us through the day. Some of us even brag about how little sleep we need. On weekends, we're "sleep camels," trying to store up the sleep we've missed. None of this is good news for our health.

The latest Sleep in America poll released by the National Sleep Foundation demonstrates that working more and sleeping less is taking a toll on us. Of those polled: 29% fell asleep or

are able to sleep through the night.

**Z** Toddlers (1-3 years) fight getting the 12-14 hours they need, including one nap. They'd rather be doing things.

**Z** Teens (13+) face special problems. They are overscheduled and under new kinds of stress, and their sleep-wake cycle changes during adolescence. Their bodies want to stay up late and wake up later, which makes it tough to get 8-9 hours of sleep on a school night.



# Sleep Smarter

were very sleepy at work in the past month; 36% have nodded off

or fallen asleep while driving; 20% have sex less often or have lost interest in sex because they're too sleepy.

## HOW MUCH SLEEP DO WE REALLY NEED?

Sleep needs vary with age. Children need a lot of sleep, and as we age, we require less sleep. Of course, some people need more sleep than others. So, consider the recommendations that follow to be averages. The best indicator that you're getting enough sleep is how you feel in the morning. If you wake up feeling rested and ready for the day, you're probably getting good quality sleep and enough of it.

**Z** Newborns (1-2 months) may sleep 10-18 hours a day, but they sleep in one-to-three hour bursts, and, as exhausted parents know, are not keyed into the light-dark, sleep-wake cycle.

**Z** Infants (3-11 months) need 9-12 hours sleep, including one to four naps. When put to bed drowsy, they

Trouble sleeping? Keep a sleep diary. In your diary, be sure to include the time you went to bed and woke up, total sleep hours and the quality of your sleep. Also, keep track of how many times you woke up during the night and what you did: i.e.

"I went to the bathroom" or "I got up and watched TV for a bit." Finally, keep track of your diet (what you ate and when), as well as the amount and times of caffeine or alcohol consumption and any drugs or medication that you took. Note your moods, paying special attention to particularly stressful or anxious times as well as happy and relaxed periods. Writing down some of your worries and concerns may help to relieve yourself of them for the night and relax.

### <Try This!

**Z** Preschoolers (3-5 years) are up all day and sleep 11-13 hours at night, but fight nightmares and would rather be up with the family, playing or watching TV.

**Z** School-aged Children (5-12 years) are busy and distracted, and struggle to get their 10-11 hours of sleep.

**Z** Adults need around eight straight hours of sleep a night.

Few get this much shut-eye. Work, family and a million other distractions often leave them asleep on their feet.

**Z** Older adults need about one to two hours less sleep than middle-aged adults. A change in circadian rhythms causes them to fall asleep earlier and wake up earlier.

When we don't sleep, we're miserable—exhausted, cranky, unable to concentrate,

depressed, and clumsy enough to suffer serious accidents. We also put ourselves at greater risk of obesity and developing diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

So next time the sun goes down, pull down the shades, pull up a pillow, and start getting healthy with a full and restful night's sleep. Sweet dreams! ■