Helping Your Child Sleep Better

Lack of good sleep habits can lead to less physical activity which may lead to less heart and muscle conditioning and increased feelings of pain. There are several ways to break this cycle. Healthy sleep practices can include some or all of the following for your child. You may have to help your child develop these practices until he is able to do them without help.

- Create a bedtime routine. Go to bed each night at the same time. If you are not able to fall asleep within 15 minutes, get up and go to another room to read, take a bath, drink warm milk, etc. Keep the lights dim and do a quiet activity (do not watch TV or listen to stimulating music.) Stay up until you feel sleepy and then return to bed. If you are still unable to sleep, repeat the same procedure.
- Get up at the same time every day. Be patient and give yourself time to develop healthy sleep habits. After 30 days of practice, your new sleep routine will become easier and you will feel the benefits of more restful sleep.
- A low level exercise program can improve fatigue, mood, body aches and sleep habits. Exercise at least 30 minutes every day. This can include bicycling, running, jogging or walking. Be sure to do this at least 2 hours before bedtime.
- Face the morning sun for 15 minutes each day. Sunshine helps to "reset" the body’s natural rhythm for activity during the day and sleep at night.
- Make sure your bedroom environment supports good sleep. It is important that your room be dark, quiet and somewhat cool to promote sleep. Keep room temperature around 68°F. Get a comfortable mattress.
- Use blackout drapes or film on the windows to darken the room. Use a small fan to create "white noise" to block out household or neighborhood noises.
- Move the clock away from the bed and face the side with the light towards the wall. This darkens the room and keeps you from looking at the clock during the night.
- Stop contact with all stimulants, as much as possible, 2 hours before bedtime. Stimulants include caffeine (especially from sodas), decongestants, TVs, radios, stereos, and computers. Remove all stimulating electronics from the bedroom.
- Dim the lights around the house an hour before bedtime. Shift from daytime activities to nighttime activities to slow down. Participate in a quiet habit every night before bed. This could include a breathing exercise (see "Breathing for Relaxation" CARE CARD), reading, meditating, or prayer to quiet your mind.
- Take a warm bath before bedtime to relax tight muscles. Add lavender, a relaxing essential oil to the bath water. A warm bath will increase your body temperature. When you go to sleep, your body temperature will drop, leading to sleep.
- Eat a starchy food, such as a plain baked potato or piece of bread, or drink a glass of plain warm milk 30 minutes before bedtime. Milk contains amino acids which can contribute to a good night’s sleep. Drink chamomile tea 30 minutes before you go to bed to calm your nerves.