Many people come to my office everyday with complaints of poor sleep. For most, the real answer does not lie with a pill. Good sleep restores. It not only improves your energy, it makes you a better problem solver and more able to deal with stresses in your day to day life. Good sleep also makes it easier to lose weight and maintain weight loss. It is important to remember that poor sleep is a symptom, not a disease. It is a symptom that there is something very out of balance in our lives. Preparation can help bring back that balance and return good sleep.

There are some simple rules to follow that if you stick to them will help you develop good sleep habits.

1) **Prepare your sleeping space**
Sleeping room must be DARK and QUIET and COOL.

Keep out extra light, your brain notices extra noises and light. Street lights that shine in our windows, lights that are kept on in the hallway, noise from other family members or neighbors, these can all affect our sleep. You can obtain a sleep mask or if your shades or drapes are not able to keep light out of your room, hang thick blankets over your windows to keep out the light. Purchase a set of earplugs. Keep your bedroom temperature sixty-eight degrees or less.

2) **Prepare your mind**
Lamps, televisions, computers and phones give off strong lights. The strong light can actually stimulate brain centers that keep us awake. Turn them down in the evening, especially in the hour or two before bed. The media content (violent or stimulating TV shows, disturbing news reports etc.) can also affect our sleep. Turn off the TV and computer at least an hour before bed.

For some people, bedtime is when all of their worries or fears come up and their worries prevent them from sleeping. If this is you, try this: Get a notebook and in the evening make a practice of spending several minutes writing down the worries, fears and things that need to be done the next day. Read over the list and then put it aside until tomorrow. You can pick up the notebook tomorrow and review and start making plans. There is nothing more to be done right now. It is time to rest.

3) **Prepare your body**
There are many practices you can adopt to help prepare your body for sleep. Take a hot bath or shower in the evening before bed. Gentle stretching exercises in the evening can help you to sleep better. You should try side stretches and some gentle stretches for your low back, and some calf stretches before bed. Chronic pain issues also can affect the quality of sleep, and many medications that are used to treat pain also affect the quality of sleep and make it more difficult to get restful sleep. Discuss with your healthcare provider what you can do to decrease your reliance on pain medication.

4) **Prepare to let go of expectations**
Sleep is not about control, sleep is about letting go. You cannot force yourself to get a good night's sleep. When one accepts this, one opens oneself up for better sleep.

5) **Prepare for a good night's sleep by embracing your day**
Sleep is not just about our nights it is also about how we spend our days. We all need to have a sense of purpose and mission in our lives. Fundamental to our living well and functioning well, is having something to care about and something to do. We have to have a reason to get up in the morning and we have to be able to look back at our day with a sense of accomplishment. Our lives matter and the time that we spend sleeping at night allows us to process and make sense of the many things and people that we encounter during our day, so that we can wake ready to face the next day's challenge.

The information contained herein should NOT be used as a substitute for the advice of an appropriately qualified and licensed physician or other health care provider. The information provided here is for educational and informational purposes only. In no way should it be considered as offering medical advice. Please check with your healthcare provider if you suspect you are ill.

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