

## GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

### Insomnia Triggers to Avoid

**Diet.** *caffeine; alcohol; nicotine;* prescription and non-prescription medication, including sleeping pills

**Lifestyle.** irregular bedtimes; exercising shortly before bedtime; insufficient physical activity; *daytime naps*

**Bedroom Environment.** noise; light

**Psychological Factors.** *academic and other stress;* family problems

### Behavioral Strategies for Improving Sleep

**Develop a Bedtime Routine.** Stop doing anything stimulating (including studying!) about a half hour *before* you are ready to go to bed. Develop a wind-down ritual that includes doing something relaxing—such as reading for pleasure, listening to soft music, watching a mindless TV show, performing gentle stretches—followed by set pre-bed activities (e.g., washing up, brushing your teeth). As much as possible, you should try to go to bed at about the same time every night. Also, go to bed *at the time when you usually fall asleep*—i.e., if you usually fall asleep at 2 a.m., go to bed *then*, not at 12 a.m. Finally, try to get up at approximately the same time every day as well; don't oversleep to make up for lost sleep.

**Stop Intrusive Thoughts.** Keep a pad and pencil handy by your bed. If you think of something you want to remember, jot it down. Then let the thought go; there will be no need to lie awake worrying about remembering it. You might also want to try this visualization technique: pretend that your mind is a chalk board. Every time a worrisome thought enters your head, visualize it as written on the chalk board and then immediately erase it. Keep erasing these thoughts as they pop up and refuse to think about them until tomorrow. Remember that sometimes it doesn't hurt to be like Scarlet O'Hara!

**Reduce Physical Stress.** If you find that you are physically unable to relax, you might benefit from progressive muscle relaxation, a technique which involves alternately tensing and relaxing each major muscle in your body one-by-one. For example, starting with your upper body, flex your shoulders tightly towards your ears. Hold this position, making the muscles as tight as you can, for 10 seconds. Release and relax your shoulders, noticing the difference between the tense and relaxed positions and feeling the warmth associated with the relaxation of the muscle; relax and breathe for 15-20 seconds. Continue this process with the other muscles in your body, working from your shoulders, neck, and arms down to your midsection, buttocks, and legs.

**Get Out of Bed!** If you are lying in bed and are unable to sleep, the best thing you can do is to *get out of bed*. Most people fall asleep within 15 minutes of going to bed, so if you're not asleep after half an hour, get up and go elsewhere to engage in a quiet activity—reading, writing letters, etc. Do not eat, drink, or smoke, which could cause you to wake up for these things in the future. When you start to feel sleepy, return to bed. Repeat this routine as often as necessary, and follow these same steps if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't fall back asleep. If you awake in the early morning hours, get up to start your day. Try to avoid naps; instead, go to bed your usual time the following night.

### Other Resources

NOTE: Both of the books below can be borrowed from the Counseling Services Self-Help Lending Library, Lauderdale 205.

 **Getting a Good Night's Sleep**—This book by Moore-Ede and LeVert helps identify factors which affect sleep, find solutions to common sleep problems, develop more healthy sleep habits, and work towards stress reduction.

 **The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook**—This book by Eshelman and McKay contains in-depth descriptions of various techniques for increasing relaxation and reducing stress, both of which improve sleep.

**Still having problems? Visit us on the web at [go.geneseo.edu/HotTopics](http://go.geneseo.edu/HotTopics) and select "College Students & Sleep."**