

8 things doctors want patients to know about healthy sleep habits

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Sara Berg, MS

News Editor

What people do throughout the day—especially before bedtime—can play a major role on their sleeping patterns by promoting healthy sleep or contributing to sleeplessness. And insufficient sleep can negatively affect a person’s health and quality of life.

It can cause moodiness, complications with memory and problems focusing. Chronic sleep loss can also lead to depression, obesity, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system. That is why it is important to follow good sleep habits—also known as sleep hygiene—to get a good night’s sleep.

The AMA’s What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series provides physicians with a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today’s health care headlines.

Here is a to-do list for patients drawn from the series on what doctors want patients to know about sleep hygiene.

1 Understand what affects a good night's sleep

From family responsibilities and work stress to illnesses, there are many factors that can interfere with a good night’s sleep. And when poor sleep happens, it can have immediate negative effects on a patient’s overall health and well-being, increasing the propensity for obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. That is why a good night’s sleep is just as important as physical

activity and healthy eating. Yet it can be hard to pinpoint what steps to take to improve sleep hygiene. Learn what doctors want patients to know about getting a good night's sleep.

2 Monitor your caffeine intake

The typical intake of caffeine of most coffee and tea drinkers has minimal risks. And while that caffeine consumption comes with a jolt of energy that helps with daytime sleepiness, it can also contribute to difficulty sleeping for some. That's why it is important to monitor your caffeine intake. Discover what doctors want patients to know about the impact of caffeine.

3 Limit screen time

While there is no right answer when it comes to defining the amount of screen time as good or bad, it is important to be mindful of the effects it has on a person's health and well-being. If screen time is interfering with sleeping and eating, then it is important to limit use. It is also important to limit use of smartphones, computers, tablets and televisions before bed because the blue light can confuse your internal clock, telling the brain it is time to be awake. Learn what doctors want patients to know about cutting down on screen time.

4 Eat a healthy diet, but not too late

Diet and nutrition play a key role in quality of sleep while certain foods and drinks can make it easier or harder to get the sleep that you need. At the same time, getting enough sleep is associated with [maintaining a healthy weight](#). Try not to go to bed hungry or too full and avoid heavy or large meals within a couple hours of bedtime. Eating too close to bedtime can cause discomfort that keeps you awake. Learn what doctors want patients to know about healthy eating.

5 Avoid unhealthy alcohol use

Disrupted routines combined with the uncertainty of the pandemic have led many people to feel isolated at home while experiencing greater stress. As a result, some people became their own bartenders and progressed into heavier drinking patterns to [cope with pandemic anger](#), stress and anxiety. And while alcohol may make you feel tired, it can disrupt your sleep later in the night. Learn what doctors want patients to know about unhealthy alcohol use.

6 Increase physical activity

Regular physical activity can help to promote better sleep. But make sure not to be active too close to bedtime because that might interrupt your sleep. Instead, exercise at least two hours before bedtime. Try to also take your exercise outside. Find out what doctors want patients to know about increasing physical activity.

7 Know how to identify and address insomnia

Even for those who have never acquired SARS-CoV-2, the COVID-19 pandemic has still exacted its toll on health. But it's not just COVID-19 itself. It's the anxiety and stress surrounding the pandemic that have contributed to insomnia—the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep. While insomnia was a problem before COVID-19, more people have been fighting a loss of sleep and are unsure of what to do. Discover what physicians want patients to know about insomnia.

8 Seek sleep apnea treatment

For patients who don't feel rested after an entire night of sleep, there may be something else going on that is interrupting sleep. After seven to eight hours of sleep, a person should feel rested, vital and ready to go. Additionally, if your bed partner is saying that you repeatedly stop breathing during sleep, it is important to know if you have sleep apnea. Find out what doctors want patients to know about sleep apnea.