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## Sleep Hygiene Guidelines

If you are here, chances are you may have a sleep problem. Sleep problems often have **two parts**: First, the medical or anatomical portion of your sleep problem and second, problems regarding your sleep environment and sleep habits. The below sleep hygiene guidelines are very important to improve your sleep. The **Fairfield County Sleep Center** recommends good sleep hygiene practices and wants to teach you how to achieve better sleep.

1. **Bed is for sleeping.** It is best to avoid reading, watching TV, eating, listening to the radio, etc. in bed. The bed is to be used for sleep and sex only. If not, we associate the bed with other activities and often it becomes difficult to fall asleep.
2. **Create the right space.** Minimize noise, light, and temperature extremes during the sleep period with ear plugs, window blinds, or an electric blanket or air conditioner. Both noise and light have been shown to disrupt falling asleep. Interestingly, if your room is too hot (above 75 degrees) or too cold (below 54 degrees) it can affect your sleep as well.
3. **Stop fluids after 8:00pm.** This may reduce awakenings due to urination.
4. **Avoid nicotine near bedtime.** Nicotine is a stimulant and should be avoided near bedtime and upon night awakenings. Thus, having a smoke before bed, although it feels relaxing, is actually putting a stimulant into your blood stream. **WE ARE NOT RECOMMENDING SMOKING. IF YOU MUST, FOLLOW THESE SUGGESTIONS:** Cut back before bed. During the 4 hours before bed have few cigarettes, and none 30-45 minutes before bed.
5. **Cut out caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.** Caffeine is in coffee (100-200mg), soda (50-75mg), iced tea, chocolate, and various over the counter medications. Caffeine stays in your system for up to 12 hours!!! Thus, try not to have any past lunch time, and decaffeinated coffee after dinner. **BE CAREFUL** if you consume large amounts of caffeine and you cut your self off too quickly. **YOU WILL GET HEADACHES** which, of course, will keep you awake.
6. **Avoid Alcohol.** Alcohol is a depressant; although it may help you fall asleep, it causes awakenings later in the night. As alcohol is digested your body goes into withdrawal from the alcohol causing nighttime awakenings, and often nightmares. Excessive alcohol use can lead to dependence and the withdrawal from alcohol dependence leads to poor sleep.
7. **Eat right.** A light snack may be sleep inducing, but a heavy meal too close to bedtime interferes with sleep. Stay away from protein and stick to carbohydrates, or dairy products. Milk contains the amino acid L-Tryptophan which has been shown in research to help people go to sleep. So milk and cookies or crackers (without chocolate) may be useful and taste good as well.
8. **Do not exercise vigorously just before bed.** If you are the type of person who is aroused by exercise, it may be best to exercise late in the afternoon (preferably an aerobic workout, like running or walking). Some studies have shown that exercise right before bed is not as bad as was once thought, unless you are the type of person who becomes more alert with exercise.