How to Improve Sleep Hygiene and Sleep Well With Depression

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How Depression and Sleep Are Connected

Depression and sleep problems have a codependent relationship that intertwines the two. People with poor sleep patterns are more likely to have depression, and people with depression are more likely to have sleep difficulties.

In fact, depression and sleep problems are linked in such a strong way that poor sleep is an actual segment of the depression diagnosis. If someone experiences unwanted changes in sleep most days over a two-week period, they meet one of the criteria for depression.

Like with other conditions, it becomes very difficult to say that depression causes sleep problems or sleep problems cause depression. In many cases, both are accurate.

Poor sleep, like insomnia, can make a person five times more likely to develop a depressive disorder.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), sleep problems related to depression fall into three general categories. They include:

- **Middle insomnia:** waking in the middle of the night followed by difficulty returning to sleep.
- **Terminal insomnia:** waking too early in the morning and being unable to fall back asleep.
- **Hypersomnia:** rather than sleeping too much, this is an increased need for sleep with longer periods of nighttime sleep and/or increased sleeping during the day.

Initial insomnia, which is the inability to fall asleep, will occur as well but at lower rates than the other types of sleep problems.

What Is Sleep Hygiene?

Whatever the type of sleep issue, moving closer to desired levels of sleep can be accomplished through sleep hygiene. Sleep hygiene is based on the idea that people all have the innate ability to get good sleep, but bad habits and negative environments change and distort this ability over time.

This view looks at sleeping as a skill that requires rehearsal to be developed and perfected. Everyone can obtain improved sleep patterns if they take steps to achieve their goal.

Think of sleep hygiene like oral hygiene; people are born with healthy gums and grow healthy teeth, but these begin to decline with time if you do not actively take steps like brushing and flossing to maintain their health.

How to Improve Your Depression and Sleep Troubles

If the problem is poor sleep, the solution is improving your sleep hygiene. Here are some great depression and

sleep hygiene tips:

Target Thoughts Regarding Sleep

How do you view sleep? How do you view sleeping? Is sleeping a welcomed part of your day or something to stress about? Do you have fears associated with the dark or sleeping?

Before you can make a serious movement with sleep hygiene, you will have to gain a better understanding of your views on sleep. Even if nothing traumatic is linked to sleep, too much stress and pressure on the situation can shrink your success.

Build Routines

Creating a system for sleep helps your body know what to expect. Try to go to sleep and wake up around the same times every day, even weekends. Getting in a rhythm trains your body to know what to anticipate.

If your current routine is not ideal, take small steps over a few weeks to slide it towards your goal. Moving your bedtime from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. will be impractical all at once, but if you move it by 30 minutes each day, you can land at a comfortable zone.

Build Rituals

Rituals are the things you do each night before bed. Perhaps you have a drink of water, take your medication, brush your teeth, and complete a relaxation technique before going to bed.

Stay consistent and your body will reward you with improved sleep. Rituals are helpful because they send signals to your body that sleep is approaching and winding down is appropriate. Taking an honest look at your rituals will give you key information about your successes and failures.

Know What to Avoid

Staying away from caffeine and nicotine for about four hours before bedtime is a good rule of thumb. These stimulants will activate your brain, making it harder to fall or stay asleep.

Even if you think you are immune to the effects of caffeine, it is still impacting your body. Avoiding alcohol is also important; although it may make you feel relaxed and drowsy when used in moderation, the impact of alcohol will diminish the quality by interrupting your sleep.

Use Your Bed

What do you use that rectangular cushion called a bed for? Is it your dinner table, your desk, your social media hub, or your movie theater? Part of building a good sleep routine is only sleeping in your bed and only using your bed for sleeping.

Let your body and your mind associate the bed with sleeping and only sleeping. Having a laptop or a cell phone in bed is stimulating and distracting. Falling asleep to your TV can disrupt sleep through the flicking light and sounds.

At the same time, make your bed and bedroom more conducive to sleep. Set the temperature to a comfortable level, purchase good quality linens and room darkening shades. If you need some sort of stimulation, purchase a white noise machine to provide some calming sounds. Fans can accomplish the same goal.

Get a Back-Up Plan

Even the best plans may not work all the time. Part of your preparation will be constructing a backup plan for

situations when sleep does not come your way.

Without a plan, you may resort to bad habits or abandon sleep hygiene completely. Your plan should include getting up and out of bed if you have not been able to fall asleep in 20 – 30 minutes.

Leave the lights low while going into a different room and read a book or magazine. Drink a small amount of water or have a light snack. Avoid bright lights, electronics, and TV. After 20 minutes, return to your bed for another attempt at sleeping.

If depression is in your life, chances are good that sleep is an issue as well. Avoid thoughts that good sleep is not an option in your life and decide to do something about it. You have an amazing amount of power and control over your sleep patterns, and sleep hygiene is your tool. By taking action, you can improve your quality and quantity of sleep to levels you thought were unachievable. Sweet dreams!