



# BALANCE

Employee Assistance Program Newsletter  
Fall 2024

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The EAP is a professional and confidential counseling service available to you and your family to help resolve personal problems before they affect your health, family or job. There is no cost to you or members of your family for services provided by the EAP.

In those cases where referrals are necessary, they can often be made to prescreened professionals or community organizations whose charges may be covered within the allowances of your health insurance. Call **845-638-8880** to arrange an appointment with an EAP specialist.

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## From the Director

**Susan Mazzarella, LCSW, CEAP**

Human beings sleep about one-third of their lives, yet people know little about the importance of this essential daily activity. Sleep is a required aspect of our overall wellbeing and survival. Sleep is critical for healthy motor, cognitive and emotional functioning.

Although it is normal for a person to be sleepy at times when they are expected to be awake; chronic drowsiness may be associated with serious difficulties including poor concentration, fatigue, lethargy, and emotional instability. Since problems associated with sleep can have profound consequences including drowsy driving, irritability, poor work performance and even workplace injuries, we have decided to dedicate this issue of BALANCE to sleep hygiene and sleep difficulties.

We will explore lifestyle factors that affect sleep and untreated sleep difficulties. Sleep patterns throughout the life cycle will also be addressed as well as healthy sleep habits. We will also discuss sleep disturbances and disorders, providing you with insight into the myths, misconceptions and pitfalls associated with sleep.

Please enjoy reading about this interesting and informative topic and we do hope it allows those reading to have “a good night’s sleep.”

*“Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.”*

*Thomas Dekker*

## Sleep Hygiene

Realize that sleep is a biological necessity. A lifestyle filled with over-stimulation, multi-tasking, hyper-arousal, superhero expectations and significant stress are incongruent with healthy sleep practices. Therefore, many Americans find themselves having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep and feeling refreshed after sleep.

These tips can help with healthy sleep patterns and hygiene:

- **Develop a 30-minute pre-sleep routine for your mind and body to wind down from the stress and activity of the day.** Reduce mental, physical and sensory (light and noise) stimulation.
- **Bed should be used only for sleep.** Avoid T.V., computer, texting, talking on the phone.
- **A 30 to 45 minute dose of early morning light is vital.** Light and activity continually reset our biological clocks.
- **Regular exercise is essential for optimal health and well being including sound sleep.** Exercising 3 to 6 hours before bedtime is optimal for relaxation.
- **Eating and drinking close to bedtime can interfere with falling and staying asleep but so can hunger.** A light snack of complex carbohydrates is fine if hungry before bedtime, however, avoid stimulants like sugar or high fructose corn syrup. Also, limit liquids to one cup within 4 hours of bedtime
- **Do not watch the clock during the night.** Remove or turn the clock around so that you can not tell the time. Set the alarm to quell any fear of oversleeping and to ensure your regular sleep schedule.
- **Napping properly can be healthful but ONLY after you have achieved a healthy sleep regime.** A 20–40-minute nap halfway through the day will be refreshing without damaging your sleep at night.

Practicing the above tips to regulate your sleep and prioritizing proper sleep hygiene can help promote overall wellness. If you or a family member are concerned with your sleep practices, consider contacting the EAP for confidential support at **845-638-8880** or email us at [MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org](mailto:MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org).

Resources: [www.sleepcounseling.org](http://www.sleepcounseling.org)

## Sleeping Pitfalls to Avoid

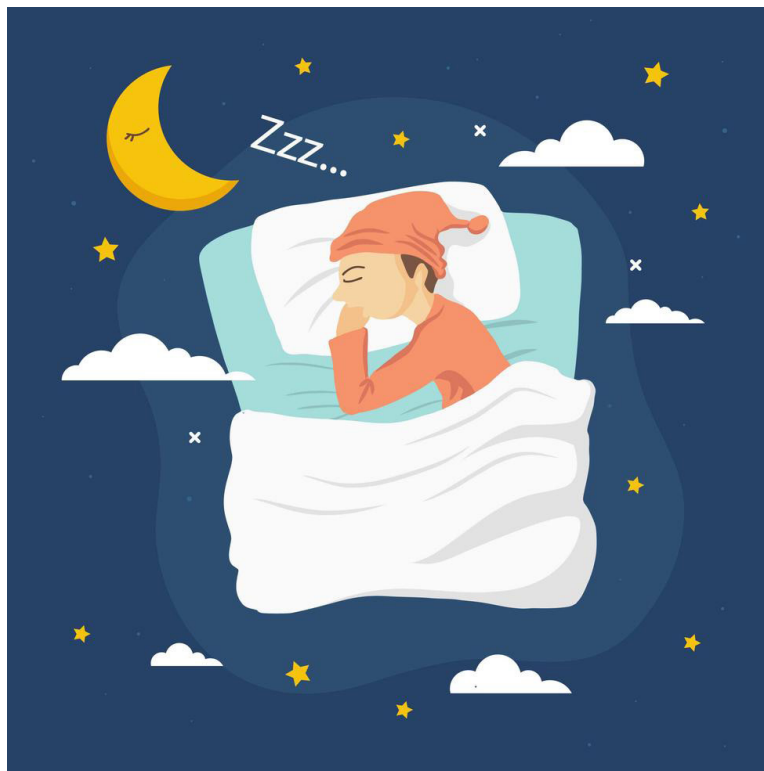
We have all experienced a poor night's sleep. A single night of sleep deprivation can impair us however when sleep loss accumulates, far more severe consequences can manifest such as long-term health consequences (autoimmune disease, hypertension, depression, etc.), public safety issues (drowsiness, poor coordination, etc.), and personal or professional difficulties (missed work or mistakes at work, relationship issues, etc.).

Poor sleep habits are among the most common causes of sleep problems in our society. Whereas nutrition and exercise are widely acknowledged as so-called “pillars of health,” too many of us are guilty of underestimating the importance of sleep. Some of the biggest sleep mistakes or pitfalls that prevent us from peacefully drifting off to sleep include:

1. **Falling asleep with the TV on.** The absence of light triggers the body's natural sleepiness mechanisms to kick in while exposing yourself to too much light too late in the day can confuse that system.
2. **Sleeping late on the weekend beyond one extra hour.** Indulging in too much extra morning shut-eye Saturday and Sunday can cause your biological clock to function as if you had traveled cross country. Waking up at the same time every morning will “anchor” your sleep schedule.
3. **Having an alcoholic drink to help you sleep.** Alcohol prevents people from deep sleep known as REM sleep which is crucial for memory and learning.
4. **Staying in bed when you can't sleep.** The longer you stay in bed willing yourself to drift off, the more anxious you'll become about getting your seven to nine hours. Do something else relaxing and low-key, like reading.

5. **Relying on prescription or over-the-counter sleep meds.** Consider a sleeping pill like a band-aid. It may mask the problem, but it won't solve it.
6. **Drinking coffee too late in the day.** The last consumption of caffeine should be at least 4-6 hours before bedtime because the stimulant has a surprisingly long half-life (meaning you might feel the effects of that afternoon pick-me-up long into the evening giving you "counterfeit energy").
7. **Hitting Snooze.** Forcing yourself to drift in and out of sleep in such short increments disrupts the natural cycle through the various phases of sleep. You're better off setting the alarm for later and getting deeper sleep throughout those last minutes.
8. **Worrying about sleep.** The more anxiety we foster around sleeping, the harder it is to doze off. Prepare yourself for a good night's sleep with a calming and centering ritual or routine such as deep breathing or aromatherapy.
9. **No down time.** We live in a world that is always on the go. It's important to take several minutes to unwind before bed. Take time to read a book, meditate, take a bath or something else that helps you to step away from the day and clear your mind before heading to bed.
10. **Cheating on your bed with your couch.** Resist the temptation to hang out on the couch when you are truly tired or exhausted. You risk falling asleep there and disturbing your equilibrium.

If you are having difficulty sleeping well through the night, you should consider your sleep habits. More importantly, if you or a loved one is experiencing symptoms that reflect more severe sleep difficulties or consequences, please contact the EAP for professional and confidential assistance at **(845) 638-8880** or email us at [MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org](mailto:MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org).



## Sleep Patterns throughout our Life Cycle

As most of us know, sleep patterns change during an individual's life span. In fact, age affects sleep more than any other natural factor. The most significant age-related change in sleep is the reduction in time spent in the deepest stages of sleep, REM, from childhood to adulthood. Infants engage in the highest percentage of deep sleep, while the elderly exhibit the most variation in duration and quality of sleep.

For any age group if sleep needs are not met, a progressive sleep "debt" occurs and although our bodies allow us to function, we may still have impaired motor and cognitive functioning. Notably, there is no substitute for sleep even though caffeine and other stimulants may counter the effects of sleep deprivation.

Newborns require the most sleep, approximately 16 to 18 hours a day. By the age of one, children generally sleep 13 to 14 hours with that number decreasing until they reach adolescence. Although most toddlers take naps prescribed by parents, which brings their total daily sleep a bit higher. As the child grows, they typically spend less time in REM sleep but rather a great deal of time in slow-wave sleep, which is important for growth.

Teenagers generally require at least eight to nine hours of sleep a day. However, with the pressures of academics, athletic, dating, etc., few teens are getting enough sleep these days. Also, teens are natural night owls as their internal biological clocks tend to keep them awake later in the evening and let them sleep later in the morning than adults.

Young adults, late teens and early 20's have the lowest rate of sleep disturbances of any age group. Although a generalization, we can say that young adulthood is the golden age of sleep. Most adults at this age require approximately 8 hours of sleep. It is at this time that individual sleep patterns are established, for example whether they are an owl or a lark.

For adult women, especially those who are pregnant or in menopause often experience significant changes in sleep patterns. Within the first three months of pregnancy mothers-to-be require significantly more sleep than usual, while later in the pregnancy they may experience insomnia due to hormone changes or other sleep difficulties that disappear after the baby is born.

Similarly, hormonal changes contribute to a decline in quality sleep during menopause. Insomnia, snoring and sleep apnea become more common during these years, possibly due to the psychological and/or physical factors associated with the aging process and weight gain associated with menopause.

The elderly need about the same amount of sleep that they needed in early adulthood, however they seldom get it. This is often because the elderly find that their slumber becomes more fitful, with several nighttime awakenings. However, during the day, older people nap more than their adult counterparts to compensate for sleep that is lost at night.

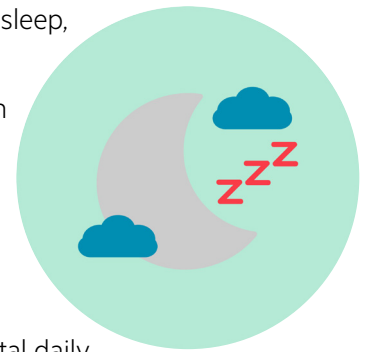
Two truths remain true throughout the various life cycles, which is that we all need sleep and if deprived of sleep we'll experience sleep loss symptoms. If you or a family member has concerns regarding sleep difficulties or their sleep patterns, contact the EAP for confidential support and guidance at **845-638-8880** or email us at [MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org](mailto:MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org).

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## **Sleep Disorders: Understanding the Impacts**



Getting enough rest is vital to one's physical and mental health. When sleep is continuously disturbed, it has the potential to interfere with the ability to have a productive life. Adults should aim to get between 7 and 8 hours of continuous sleep per night. When half or less of the recommended rest is attained, impaired memory, cognition, and coordination are very likely to occur. This lax in functioning makes it difficult to perform everyday activities. Medical conditions can also be caused by or exacerbate sleep problems.

Sleep hygiene is the practice of routine activities that promote quality rest during the night and alertness during the day. Chronic poor sleep hygiene

may manifest into a sleep disorder. Although everyone has a bad night of rest occasionally, if you experience trouble sleeping consistently, the pattern may be a symptom of an undiagnosed sleep disorder that requires medical attention. The following five sleep disorders are the most common:

**Insomnia**-associated with a profound inability to fall asleep and/or trouble remaining asleep throughout the night. Approximately 9% to 12% of Americans suffer with chronic insomnia. Insomnia may be situational, lasting a week or less, or chronic, lasting longer than a month.

**Narcolepsy**-involves severe overwhelming sleepiness during the day. Research has indicated that narcolepsy runs in families and is caused by a dysfunction in the brain mechanisms responsible for sleep and waking. Studies show that the disease may begin in childhood, but fully manifests during young adulthood.

**Sleep Apnea**- Sleep Apnea is characterized by a temporary cessation of breathing due to a blocked or closed airway behind the tongue or nose. This restriction of air causes the brain to "wake up" intermittently, disrupting quality of sleep. Sleep Apnea increases risk for strokes and high blood pressure, heart attacks, and heart disease.

**Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS)**-related to aching, itching, burning, or tingling sensations in the lower extremities as an individual is falling asleep. The sufferer experiences an intense urge to move their legs to alleviate the sensations in their legs. RLS is prevalent in middle age and has been shown to be genetic.

**Sleepwalking/Somnambulism**-characterized by walking or other physical activity during the deepest levels of sleep. The sleepwalker is not cognizant of these episodes in the morning. There is a high occurrence in children, affecting nearly 15%, usually between the ages of two and six.

Studies suggest that nearly 95% of treatable sleep disorders go undiagnosed. In many instances, a combination of medication, engagement in stress reducing activities before bed, or other simple lifestyle changes make all the difference in getting a quality night's rest.

If your sleep patterns resemble any of the above descriptions, contact the Montefiore Nyack Hospital Sleep Center at **(845) 348-2209** to undergo a sleep evaluation. In addition, you can contact the EAP for confidential guidance and support at **(845) 638-8880** or [MNH-EAP@montefiorennyack.org](mailto:MNH-EAP@montefiorennyack.org).

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<http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/sleep/disorders/9-most-common-sleep-disorders.htm>





## **Tips for Maximizing your Sleep**

- Purchase a comfortable pillow and replace it every 2 years.
- Use room darkener curtains and blinds, when possible.
- Schedule yourself time to wind down 30 minutes before sleep.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine within 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid exercise within two hours of bedtime.
- Before bed, create calming rituals e.g., warm shower/bath, dim lights, wear an eye mask, listen to relaxing music.
- Turn the alarm clock around to avoid seeing the light of the numbers and making it more difficult to see throughout the night.
- If you need to have your mobile next to you – face it down and turn off the ringer.
- Be consistent with bed and rising times, if sleeping late maximize by one hour later.
- Use night lights instead of turning on the lights when getting up in the middle of the night.
- Prepare for Daylight Savings Time to avoid losing sleep, *whether moving the clock forward or back*. Make gradual bedtime shifts about a week before the time changes.