



Let's Talk

Getting Your ZZZZZs: Tips for Good Sleep

Wouldn't it be nice to get more sleep—or at least better sleep?

TIPS FOR GETTING GOOD SLEEP

- Have a regular bedtime routine
- Brush and floss your teeth about a half an hour before your desired bedtime
- Listen to relaxing music that you begin to associate with bedtime
- Drink a glass of water
- Work on the next day's to-do list—write it down on paper, so that it doesn't have to be in your head
- Set a designated time each day to start your bedtime routine
- Make sure you stay close to this schedule throughout the week—even weekends
- Allow yourself enough time to complete your routine to ensure that you get about seven to nine hours of sleep
- Create a room that's ideal for sleeping. Keep work materials, computers and televisions out of the room (this will reinforce the association of the bedroom with sleeping)

- Avoid caffeine and other stimulants at least six to eight hours before bedtime
- Avoid media (TV, movies, video games, etc.) that contain disturbing images or content

TROUBLE SLEEPING?

If you're having trouble sleeping, you can do progressive relaxation or deep-breathing exercises to calm your body and mind. A simple technique is progressively relaxing your body by starting with your toes, then your feet, your lower legs, etc., until you reach your face and scalp. As you relax each area, just imagine all the stress melting away.

You can follow this with a deep-breathing exercise. Simply count out how long it takes you to inhale and to exhale. You may observe that it takes you a count of 5 to exhale, at first, and a count of 5 to inhale. Now, try to extend that count by one more each time without struggling in any way—

just keep it very relaxed and easy. You'll probably find that you've drifted off to sleep before the exercise is over.

If the techniques above haven't helped, don't stay in bed. Remember, you want your association with the bed and the bedroom to be about successfully sleeping—not tossing and turning. Go into another room and meditate or read while you listen to calming music. Avoid things like television, the Internet, or computer games, which can be too stimulating—and they can distract you from sensing that you're feeling sleepy enough to return to bed.

Renewing the body—and mind—and waking up well-rested and refreshed is your main goal—well worth the time spent. □



Moving Forward: Dealing with Depression

Depression can have a major impact on your life. It tends to drag you down, keeping you from experiencing your full potential.



Some people have the classic symptoms of feeling “blue,” while others appear to be functioning normally while just below the surface are feelings of sadness, discouragement, and worthlessness. You may have an okay day or two, but have to admit that you haven’t been totally yourself for a long time.

One of the biggest problems with depression is that it robs you of the energy and motivation necessary to deal effectively with the disorder and move forward.

MOVING FORWARD

The first step is acknowledging that you are depressed. For information on some of the common symptoms of depression, read “Recognizing Depression” in this issue. The next step is to take action—and seek help, if you need it—so that you can successfully overcome depression and move on.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING DEPRESSION

If your depression is not too serious, you may try some simple things to help avoid biochemical, emotional, and psychological factors that can contribute to the disorder.

- Get plenty of physical activity, especially aerobic activity—brisk walking, running, biking, etc.
- Get quality sleep
- Add more social activity to your week
- Find activities that get you out and make you feel good about yourself—sports teams, adult education classes, etc.
- Avoid alcohol and other recreational drug use—drugs taken to escape or to elevate your mood rather than those used for medicinal purposes
- Volunteer—this can get you “out of yourself”—not as worried about your

own problems—and it can get you into a more social environment

- Reprogram negative thought patterns with positive affirmations. For example, rather than allowing a thought like “I’m never happy” or “I wish I were happier” to dominate, you can replace this thought pattern with “I deserve to be happy” and “Everything’s going my way now.” The affirmation will likely not seem true at first, but as you become more comfortable with the new thought pattern, you’ll begin to feel less anxious about these issues.

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP

Often, the only way to move forward is with the help of a professional. Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to learn more about depression, or to get help for yourself or someone you love. □

Are You in a Codependent Relationship?

Codependency is a dynamic where one or both persons in the relationship feel an excessive and unhealthy responsibility for the other person's life.

Individuals with codependent tendencies tend to place a lower priority on their own needs, while being excessively preoccupied with the needs of others.

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Do you feel you're responsible for the happiness of others?
- Do your needs always take a backseat to the needs of other people in your life?
- Do you not do what you really want to do in order to accommodate someone else?
- Do you think that it's your job to make someone else's life better or easier?

We often do things a certain way because that's the way we've always done them.

Unfortunately, when we do this we tend to stop seeing our motives and intentions. We also don't perceive how these patterns of behavior may no longer serve our needs.

People in co-dependent relationships often don't realize that their relationships are not functioning in a healthy way. They're not aware that they are losing themselves—and sometimes their identity—in the relationship.

BREAKING THE PATTERN

The important thing to remember is that co-dependency is a learned behavior and that it takes some new strategies to help you "unlearn" it. The good news is that you are not alone and help is available.

What to do if you feel you are in a co-dependent relationship:

- See a counselor, like those available through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at your job.
- Attend CoDA (Co-Dependents Anonymous) meetings—you'll meet other people dealing with similar issues. (You can find information on CoDA on the Web.)

BEING AWARE

Some general signs that you may be in an unhealthy relationship:

- Your focus is on someone else's happiness over your own
- You're worried that some small thing you do may make you lose the love or respect of someone close to you
- You no longer socialize with your friends and your family like you used to
- Thinking about your relationship makes you feel depressed or anxious
- You have strong feelings that you are being pressured or controlled by someone in your life
- Someone is using harsh words to hurt or control you
- Someone is using physical violence or force to hurt or control you

If you are experiencing an unhealthy relationship, or if someone you know is living with physical or verbal abuse or in an overly controlling environment, help is available. Contact the EAP to learn more. □

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION

It is important to recognize the symptoms of depression and be aware of them when they emerge, so you can take action to deal effectively with the disorder and get the help you need, should you need it.

Read “*Moving Forward: Dealing with Depression*” on page 2 in this issue for some tips that may help you avoid the downward spiral of depression.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

The most common symptoms include regularly and consistently feeling:

- Sad—“down” or “blue”
- Numb or detached—feeling “empty”
- Hopeless
- Fatigued
- Worthless—low self esteem
- Helpless
- Overwhelmed
- Pessimistic
- Nervous or anxious
- Irritable
- Restless

You, or someone you know, may have one or more of these symptoms. If depression becomes overwhelming, or if it gets in the way of living your life as fully as you would like, talk to a mental health professional or a physician to start the first steps of moving ahead—and away from depression.

WARNING SIGNS

If you continue to suffer from the effects of emotional distress and feel overwhelmed by it, you should contact a professional. Here are some other things that can indicate that you need to seek the help of a professional:

- Consistent inability to sleep
- Concentration problems that are interfering with your work or home life
- Using tobacco, food, drugs, or alcohol to cope with depression and other difficult emotions
- Feeling down, hopeless, or helpless most of the time
- Hearing voices that are not there or having other hallucinations
- Phobias or fears that you can’t control
- Negative or self-destructive thoughts that you can’t control or that won’t go away*
- Thoughts of death or suicide*

* *Self-destructive behavior or thoughts, especially thoughts of suicide, require immediate attention. If you experience such feelings, call 911. You can also contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s toll-free number, which is available 24 hours every day of the year: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This service is available to everyone. For more information about the signs and symptoms of depression, contact your EAP. You may call for yourself or for someone you care about. All calls are confidential.*

You deserve to have a happier life, so seek help when you need it. □



This newsletter is brought to you by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, management consultation, and coaching services to Federal employees and agencies throughout the United States.

For administrative details about the program, contact Chiquita Cooper at 404-562-7950, ext. 125, or email Chiquita.Cooper@foh.hhs.gov.

To visit us on the Web, please go to www.FOH4You.com.

Help is available all day, all week, all year. 800-222-0364, TTY: 888-262-7848.

Let’s Talk is available electronically at www.FOH.hhs.gov/eapnews.

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