Sleep Hygiene

The most common cause of insomnia is a change in your daily routine. For example, traveling, change in work hours, disruption of other behaviors (eating, exercise, leisure, etc.), and relationship conflicts can all cause sleep problems. Paying attention to good sleep hygiene is the most important thing you can do to maintain good sleep.

Do:

1. Go to bed at the same time each day.
2. Get up from bed at the same time each day.
3. Get regular exercise each day, preferably in the morning. There is good evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. This includes stretching and aerobic exercise.
4. Keep the temperature in your bedroom comfortable
5. Keep the bedroom quiet when sleeping.
6. Keep the bedroom dark enough to facilitate sleep.
7. Keep the bedroom dark enough to facilitate sleep.
8. Use your bed only for sleep and sex.
9. Take medications as directed. It is helpful to take prescribed sleeping pills 1 hour before bedtime, so they are causing drowsiness when you lie down, or just 10 hours before getting up, to avoid daytime drowsiness.
10. Use a relaxation exercise just before going to sleep: muscle relaxation, imagery, massage, warm bath, etc.
11. Keep your feet and hands warm. Wear warm socks and/or mittens/gloves to bed.

Don't:

1. Exercise just before going to bed.
2. Engage in stimulating activity just before bed, such as playing a competitive game, watching an exciting program on television or movie, or having an important discussion with a loved one
3. Have caffeine in the evening (coffee, teas, chocolate, sodas, etc.)
4. Read or watch television in bed.
5. Use alcohol to help you sleep.
6. Go to bed too hungry or too full.
7. Take another person's sleeping pills.
8. Take over-the-counter sleeping pills, without your doctor's knowledge. Tolerance can develop rapidly with these medications. Diphenhydramine (an ingredient commonly found in over-the-counter sleep meds) can have serious side effects for elderly patients.
9. Take daytime naps.
10. Command yourself to go to sleep. This only makes your mind and body more alert.

If you lie in bed awake for more than 20-30 minutes, get up, go to a different room (or different part of your bedroom), participate in a quiet activity (e.g. non-excitable reading or television), and then return to bed when you feel sleepy. Do this as many times during the night as needed.

Dr. Manav K. Salwan
Dr. Ashima Salwan