

Ways to ensure a good night's sleep

By Mandy Kendall

A friend and I were talking about the most unusual weather we've been having recently and how nature seems to be getting a tad confused about it, too. Squirrels out and about, trees are budding, birds are chirping. We also wondered if the "supposed to be hibernating" bears were also being stirred from their slumber too.

Sleep can be blissful, when it happens, but can also be elusive, frustrating and damaging to our health if we don't get enough.



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Sleep is essential for our physical and mental wellbeing and many studies have shown there is a strong link between poor sleep and many chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, depression and obesity. Adults need at least seven hours a night to allow the body to rest and repair itself. Children and adolescents need up to 10 hours sleep to help them develop mentally and physically.

So this week's *Qwik-e* (Quick and Easy) tips are about how to get the best night's sleep possible.

Avoid too much overload before you go to bed. Limit exercise

in the last few hours before you go to bed. Five minutes of gentle stretching will help to release tension but anything more is likely to get your system kicked into high gear. Try and avoid large heavy fatty meals or sugary foods at the end of the day, light protein based meals are best. Limit light interference in the room; our brains respond to light as a signal to wake up, so even the light from an electric clock can stimulate our brains to wake up. Sometimes a good old-fashioned eye mask is easier than trying to block out lights from outside. Earplugs or white noise machines help cut out background noise that we might not be able to reduce too.

Set the scene. Our bodies like routine so try to set a pattern to follow each night. Go to bed about the same time each night. Take a shower or bath (not too hot), try a warm drink (no caffeine), read, keep the bedroom at a cool temperature or perhaps try some meditation (with a CD or by yourself). All these will help prepare the body for sleep.

If you can't sleep – do something. If you've been awake for 20 minutes or more, try something that's not too energetic. Reading or doing a crossword for example will help occupy your mind preventing you thinking about stressful or emotive things.

Write it down. If you can't stop thinking about something try writing it down, and maybe how you plan to deal with it during the day. Then distract your brain from that topic with something neutral like re-running a favorite movie in your mind, going through the times tables in your head or maybe even the proverbial counting sheep.

Need a nap? If you can't make it through the day and you need to take a nap, try to keep it to no more than 20 minutes and as early in the afternoon as possible, just after lunch is best.

Until next time, sweet dreams!

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe. If you have any questions, feel free to drop me an email at healthconnective@gmail.com, visit us on Facebook, or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.