Counting Sheep: A Guide for Healthy Sleep

Alexandra Thurston, Psy.D.
UCSF Student Health & Counseling Services (SHCS)
Agenda

• Sleep Facts
• Sleep Hygiene
• Changing Thoughts about Sleep
• Cognitive & Relaxation Strategies
• What if I STILL Can’t Sleep?
Taking a Mindful Moment
Sleep Facts

• Insomnia is very common!
• Average amount of sleep most adults need: 7-9 hours
• Sleep Deprivation is Associated With:
  • Depression, Anxiety
  • Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular problems, stroke, high blood pressure
  • Fluctuations in weight
  • Decreased alertness, concentration, memory, problem solving, judgment & reasoning, accidents & injuries on the job
  • Impairments in cognitive and motor performance equivalent to alcohol intoxication (Williamson & Feyer, 2000)
Insomnia is often due to:

- Stress, having an over-active mind
- Dysfunctional thoughts about sleep
- Bad sleep habits
Sleep Hygiene

• Use your bed only for sleeping and sex
  • Do NOT do work in bed
  • Re-condition your expectations
• Shut off electronic devices 1 hour before bedtime
• Maintain the same wake and bedtime, even on weekends
• Avoid naps – but if you do nap, keep it short (20 min max)
• Spend time outside during the day to increase natural light exposure
Sleep Hygiene

• Get daily, regular exercise
• Create a comfortable, sleep-conducive environment
• Create a relaxing sleep routine
• Don’t watch the clock!
• If you have trouble falling asleep (>30 minutes), get out of bed and do something else until you feel sleepy
Food & Sleep

• Avoid caffeine after 2 pm
• Avoid liquids before bed
• Avoid large meals before bed
• Minimize alcohol intake
Partner Activity

• Turn to the person next to you and share:
  • 1) What motivated you to come to today’s presentation?
  • 2) What are some bad sleep habits you have developed since being in grad school?
  • 3) What are 2-3 sleep hygiene strategies you plan to implement to improve your sleep?
Most of us incorrectly perceive our sleep and develop false and/or negative thoughts about sleep

- Often have unrealistic expectations of sleep or ruminate about consequences of sleep less

- Reduce sleep-interfering thoughts and worries, manage stress and learn to calm your active mind
“I’m never going to fall asleep tonight!”

“I won’t be able to function tomorrow if I don’t fall asleep soon. I’ll do poorly in class/work/lab.”

“I didn’t get enough sleep last night so I’m going to be miserable today.”

“I’m always grumpy when I don’t sleep well”

“What if I never sleep well again?”

“I’m a bad sleeper.”

“I always need 8 hours of sleep to function.”
What can you tell yourself instead?

“Eventually I will fall asleep, it just make take a little time.”
“T is may not feel that good as I want, but I will still be able to function just as I have in the past.”
“I don’t have to be miserable, I can take a walk or have a lighter load”
“I am not always grumpy, I have been in a good mood with little sleep before”
“I’ve slept well in the past and I will be able to sleep well again”
“I am probably getting more sleep than I think and I can perform well on less than 8 hours of sleep”
Partner Activity

• Turn to the person next to you and share:
  • 1) What are some of your “danger thoughts”, or unhelpful or dysfunctional thoughts, you have had about sleep?
  • 2) Brainstorm ways you can replace these thoughts with more reassuring and realistic statements.
**Anxious Thoughts**

- **Before bedtime**
  - Journal about worries during the evening, 30-60 minutes before bedtime
  - Distinguish between solvable and unsolvable worries
- **In bed**
  - Practice deep breathing
  - Visualize yourself letting go of anxious thoughts
    - “Shelve” worries
    - Imagine worries as leaves, clouds, trains passing by
The Cognitive Shuffle

• Mentally picturing a random sequence of objects for a few seconds each (e.g. a horse, a can of beans, a doll etc.)
• Make sure the sequence of images is meaningless, otherwise you’ll start ruminating again
• Pick a word like “bedtime” and then imagine words that start with B, then E, etc.
• MySleepButton app will whisper random words to you
Relaxation Strategies

- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery
- Meditation
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Relaxation Exercise

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Feet
- Lower Legs
- Upper Legs
- Stomach
- Upper Arms
- Back
- Shoulders
- Chest
- Lower Arms
- Hands
- Neck
- Face
What if I STILL Can’t Sleep?

• Making changes takes time and practice—change may not be immediate
• Try keeping a sleep diary
  • http://yoursleep.aasmnet.org/pdf/sleepdiary.pdf
• Consider an evaluation for temporary sleep aid medication
  • If you are severely sleep-deprived
  • Lack of sleep is affecting your work and daily functioning
• Consult with a counselor
  • Can aid with implementing behavioral and cognitive changes
  • If you feel unusually anxious or sad
For More Information

• Student Health & Counseling Services (SHCS)
  • 415-476-1281
  • Mission Bay: Rutter Building, 3rd floor
  • Parnassus: Millberry Union, P8

• Student Health Outreach Calendar:
  • http://studenthealth.ucsf.edu/calendar