Sleep Tips
The Sleep Cycle

- Sleep is a core physiological function that impacts many other important areas of functioning (e.g., energy, mood, appetite, motivation, concentration, efficiency).
- The average adult needs 6-9 hours of sleep. Consistently getting less than 6 hours per night leads to a range of health consequences, and consistently getting more than 9 hours leads to excessive lethargy and fatigue.
- We have 2 main types of sleep: (1) REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is characterized by dreaming and is the state in which restoration of our brain and body functions occurs, including energy conservation and memory consolidation; and (2) non-REM sleep, which is characterized by 4 stages of sleep that progressively deepen from light sleep, to restful sleep, to deep sleep. We cycle through Stages 1, 2, 3, 4 and REM throughout the night. Each cycle takes approximately 90 minutes, and throughout the night we increasingly spend a longer period of time in REM (which leads to sleeping being “restorative”, or restful).
- Sleep patterns are impacted by a range of factors, including stress levels, low mood and depression, worry, physical health conditions, medications, and worry about sleep.
- The good news is that our bodies are very resilient and can recover from chronic sleep debt within a few days to a week.

Common Sleep Problems

- Insomnia is characterized by difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep and/or earlymorning awakenings. Individuals with insomnia feel unrefreshed upon awakening, and feel fatigued during the day. The most effective treatment for insomnia is cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) that focuses on thoughts/worries about sleep and behavioural sleep patterns (and impact on emotional state).
- Restless leg syndrome is a sensory disorder characterized by an irresistible urge to move one’s legs (and sometimes arms) due to uncomfortable, tingling, or creeping sensations. Treatment includes the minimization/reduction of caffeine, nicotine and alcohol; iron replacement; exercise/stretching; and, warm baths or cold packs.
- Narcolepsy is a rare sleep disorder characterized by frequent periods of sleepiness (both gradual and sudden sleep attacks), sometimes associated with cataplexy (muscle weakness). Treatment includes stimulant pharmacotherapy and stress management.
- Sleep apnea is a common but underdiagnosed, possibly life-threatening sleep disorder that primarily impacts men who are overweight, have a thick neck girth, and are heavy snorers. The primary feature of obstructive sleep apnea is a partial blockage of airways causing abnormal breathing patterns and sleep disruptions (e.g., repeatedly stopping
breathing in the night). Treatment includes weight loss; minimization of alcohol; and treatment by a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine at bedtime.

**Mood, Worry, & Sleep**

- If you are having trouble identifying contributors to sleep problems, it can be helpful to keep a sleep diary for 1-2 weeks (e.g., track your diet, work and leisure activities, level of stress, and bed/wake times). Keeping a diary can help identify patterns and factors that are impacting sleep that you may not be otherwise be aware of.
- Depression and anxiety are the most common psychological health conditions, and will impact 1 out of 4 adults at some point in their life. Depression and anxiety both significantly impact sleep.
- Cognitive-behavioural treatment (CBT) is the most effective treatment for sleep problems, as well as associated mood and worry issues.
  - Worry and anxiety is a normal part of life, but is one of the strongest factors that impacts sleep. If you are finding worries are preventing you from sleeping, it can be helpful to keep a “worry log” – get out of bed, write down your worries, and ask yourself 3 key questions (“what is the evidence for this worry?”; “what is the problem to be solved?”; and, “what can I do right now?”).
  - Relaxation strategies (e.g., diaphragmatic breathing, visual imagery, progressive muscle relaxation) can help with sleep onset and maintenance.

**Effective Sleep Hygiene Principles**

- Having a consistent, fixed wake-up time (even on weekends!) is one of the most important factors in building a consistent sleep pattern. Expose yourself to outside light (e.g., open blinds) upon waking.
- If you are having sleep problems, do not nap! Naps interfere with the restorative value of sleep later on that night. The best strategy is to get into bed earlier that evening.
- Do not have caffeine after 12pm – 1pm (the half life of caffeine is 5 hours – which means that 5 hours after having caffeine, 50% of the caffeine is still left in your body; it takes another 5 hours to have the caffeine be reduced in half, to 25%).
- Do not smoke or exercise 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Even one drink of alcohol interferes with sleep quality and makes sleep less restorative.
- Create a bedtime routine that is relaxing; have decaffeinated tea, warm milk, or a warm bath. Make a clear distinction between daytime (alert) activities and bedtime (relaxing) activities.
• Make your bedroom environment comfortable and conducive to sleep (e.g., get comfortable pillow and bedding; keep room temperature moderate; darken the room).
• Restrict your bed for 2 activities – sleep and sex. Do not watch TV, eat, talk on the phone, argue, or use your computer while in bed.
• If you can’t fall asleep within 15-20 minutes, get out of bed and do not get back into bed until you are sleepy (not just tired).

Melatonin, Jet-lag, & Medications

• Sleeping medications (prescription and non-prescription) should only be used intermittently, for a short-duration (5-10 days maximum). More extended use leads to drug tolerance, dependence, withdrawal effects, side effects, and rebound insomnia (where sleep problems after medication cessation become worse than they were prior to taking medications). Never mix sleep medications with alcohol, and always ensure you have allowed for at least 7-8 hours to sleep after taking medication.
• Melatonin is the key hormone that increases sleepiness (melatonin secretion is higher in the dark, and decreases with light exposure). About 50% of people with sleep problems can benefit from up to 3mg of melatonin, taken 0.5 to 1.0 hours before bedtime.
• Jet lag refers to disruptions in the body’s internal biological clock (circadian rhythms) due to crossing time zones. Some tips to minimize jet lag include:
  o Adjusting to the new time zone 2-3 days before travel (e.g., shift bedtime, wake-time and mealtimes).
  o Ensure you are getting adequate sleep before travel (as a pre-existing “sleep debt” makes jet lag worse).
  o Minimize alcohol.
  o Adjust meals and bedtime to the new time zone ASAP.
  o Due to the gastrointestinal impact of jet lag, it can be helpful to drink lots of water and eat small, frequent, healthy meals when travelling. Having a consistent, fixed wake-up time (even on weekends!) is one of the most important factors in building a consistent sleep pattern.