Mind Your ZZZs and Snooze

Drug-free home remedies for insomnia

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For many PWAs, a good night's sleep isn't on the daily schedule – no matter how much they'd like it to be. Some have their sleep disrupted by the effects of such medications as diuretics, antihistamines and decongestants. Just having HIV can make your body work harder and need more sleep, or can disrupt normal sleep rhythms, causing daytime fatigue. All this is added to the demands of modern life that cause sleep disorders in millions of the HIV negative.

Be aware that sleeping pills aren't the only answer. In fact, most experts advise against long-term use of sleep meds, since tolerance (you need ever-higher doses) and dependence (you can't fall asleep without them) can develop. And side effects such as daytime drowsiness, confusion and reduced coordination can occur. Short-term use of sleeping pills *can* help counter sleep loss from stress or travel and might help prevent sleeplessness from becoming chronic. But before you reach for a pill, try one of these ideas:

Shut out light and sound. If these are part of the problem, adjust whatever you can. If there's too much light in your room, try an old-fashioned sleep mask. They really help, and the soft satin ones are perfectly comfortable. If you need sound-dampening, try soft, foam-rubber earplugs. They'll block pout almost anything, so make sure you can still hear your fire alarm.

Don't use your bedroom for work. Sleep researchers advise that the room you sleep in be restricted to that. That way, just entering the room will suggest sleep to you. Do everything you can to set up a separate sleeping environment.

Keep a daily routine. researchers also counsel going to bed at around the same time every night, so your body learns to expect top sleep at that time. If falling asleep has been a problem, avoiding naps or late sleeping can also help. By keeping to a more regular snooze schedule, you'll be more likely to feel truly drowsy at the appropriate time. It's also helpful to have a regular winding-down period of quiet reading, peaceful music, meditation or whatever works best to relax you.

Try relaxation techniques. Yoga, meditation, biofeedback, visualization and many other relaxation techniques have proved effective.

Avoid sleep disrupters. Exercise in the late evening is a no-no, shown to degrade sleep quality.

But exercise earlier in the day may actually help you sleep better. Avoid caffeine in the evening since it remains in the body for several hours. Alcohol near bedtime causes abnormal brain activity that can prevent deep, restful sleep.

Change your attitude. If you've come to expect trouble sleeping, your anxiety itself may keep you up/. Any time sleep hasn't come within 20 to 30 minutes, get back up and resume your normal late-night activities until you feel sleepy. The idea is to reprogram yourself so you can once again associate the bed with sleepiness, instead of stress.

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