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Too much stress— too little sleep

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

This past holiday season has been crazy and I've been stressed, so I'm having trouble sleeping. What are some ways to help improve my sleep?

SLEEP is essential to your body's repair and restoration. If you don't sleep, you start to feel unhealthy; worse yet, you can get really ill. To sleep well, you have to establish good habits. In medicine that's called "sleep hygiene." Just as you attend to oral hygiene and overall body hygiene, you should see your sleep routine as something as important as brushing your teeth or taking a shower or bath.

Sleep is not optional. Let's start with that. If your body needs eight hours of sleep, don't force it to only six hours. Everybody is different. Some bodies need more sleep and some need less. So, how can you tell how many hours of sleep you need?

When you go on your next vacation, don't set an alarm. Don't stay up late watching TV, partying or reading. See when you get tired naturally, and then go to bed. Then see when you wake up in the morning, without an alarm and feeling good. You might need a few days into the vacation before you can test this out; your body may be jet lagged and you may still be wound up from finishing work.

The number of hours your body naturally sleeps on its own without an alarm or interruptions is how much it needs to rest every

day. The next time you want to train your body to sleep less, remember that every person is programmed differently. You can't veer too drastically from that or your body will be too tired to do all the wonderful things you plan for yourself every day.

Finally, try to keep your sleep area as free of clutter and distraction as possible. Make time to quiet your body before going to bed so you can fall asleep easier. Right before bed, if you are working on the computer, watching suspenseful shows or dealing with stressful things, it can be harder to fall asleep. And it may lead to fitful sleep through the night.

I liken going to sleep to landing an airplane. You want to make it smooth and uneventful. Take some time before bed to calm yourself and quiet your environment by



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Three ways to get some sleep:

- 1** Make sleep a priority. Plan for it.
- 2** Your body needs the right amount of sleep. Listen to your body and give it what it needs.
- 3** Ease into sleep. Quiet yourself and your environment in advance so you can have a restful sleep. If you're going to take the time out of your busy schedule to sleep, you might as well make it high quality.

doing relaxing things. Turn down the lights in the room to get your body into a restful state. A pilot doesn't want to descend too steeply from a high altitude, but to ease into the landing. Do the same with sleep.

Sleep is a complicated thing. There are so many factors that can make it good—or bad. Learn how to sleep well. In the long run, that will keep both your mind and body healthy. Sleep is when your body repairs itself. That fact alone makes it super important to learn to sleep well. **2**

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