# HELPING HANDS

## Sleep Health

(excerpts from nhlbi.nih.gov)

Sleep was long considered just a block of time when your brain and body shut down. Thanks to sleep research studies done over the past several decades, it is now known that sleep has distinct stages that cycle throughout the night in predictable patterns. How well rested you are and how well you function depend not just on your total sleep time but on how much sleep you get each night and the timing of your sleep stages.

Your brain and body functions stay active through out sleep, and each stage of sleep is linked to a specific type of brain waves (distinctive patterns of electrical activity in the brain). Sleep is divided into two basic types: rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-REM sleep (with three different stages). Typically, sleep begins with non-REM sleep. In stage 1 non-REM sleep, you sleep lightly and can be awakened easily by noises or other disturbances. During this first stage of sleep, your eyes move slowly, your muscles relax, and your heart and breathing rates begin to slow.

Next you enter stage 2 non-REM sleep, which is defined by slower brain waves with occasional bursts of rapid waves. You spend about half the night in this stage. When you progress into stage 3 non-REM sleep, your brain waves become even slower, and the brain produces extremely slow waves almost exclusively. Stage 3 is a very deep stage of sleep, during which it is very difficult to be awakened. Children who wet the bed or sleep walk tend to do so during stage 3 of non-REM sleep. Deep sleep is considered the "restorative" stage of sleep that is necessary for feeling well rested and energetic during the day.

Many factors can prevent a good night's sleep. These factors range from well-known stimulants, such as coffee, to certain pain relievers, decongestants, and other culprits. Many people depend on the caffeine in coffee, cola, or tea to wake them up in the morning or to keep them awake. Caffeine is thought to block the cell receptors that adenosine (a substance in the brain) uses to trigger its sleep-inducing signals. In this way, caffeine fools the body into thinking it isn't tired. It can take as long as 6–8 hours for the effects of caffeine to wear off completely. Thus, drinking a cup of coffee in the late afternoon may prevent your falling asleep at night.

Nicotine is another stimulant that can keep you awake. Nicotine also leads to lighter than normal sleep, and heavy smokers tend to wake up too early because of nicotine withdrawal. Although alcohol is a sedative that makes it easier to fall asleep, it prevents deep sleep and REM sleep, allowing only the lighter stages of sleep. People who drink alcohol also tend to wake up in the middle of the night when the effects of an alcoholic "nightcap" wear off.

Certain lifestyle factors also may deprive a person of needed sleep. Large meals or vigorous exercise just before bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep. While vigorous exercise in the evening may delay sleep onset for various reasons, exercise in the daytime is associated with improved nighttime sleep.

# Better Sleep Tips

1) Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
2) Avoid caffeine and nicotine. Coffee, colas, certain teas, and chocolate contain the stimulant caffeine, and its effects can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully.
3) Exercise is great, but not too late in the day. Try to exercise at least 30 minutes on most days but not later than 2–3 hours before your bedtime.
4) Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed. Having a "nightcap" or alcoholic beverage before sleep may help you relax, but heavy use robs you of deep sleep and REM sleep, keeping you in the lighter stages of sleep.
5) Avoid large meals and beverages late at night. A light snack is okay, but a large meal can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep..
6) Don't take naps after 3 p.m. Naps can help make up for lost sleep, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night.
7) Relax before bed. Don't over-schedule your day so that no time is left for unwinding. A relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, should be part of your bedtime ritual.
8) Have a good sleeping environment. Get rid of anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or warm temperatures.

## *IAM Peer Employee Assistance Program*

The heart and soul of the District 141 Employee Assistance Program is the local lodge EAP peer coordinator. These dedicated men and women volunteer their personal time to assist other union members and their families who are experiencing personal difficulties. EAP coordinators do not make clinical diagnoses or clinical evaluations, however, they are trained to make a basic assessment of your situation and refer you to an appropriate resource for a more detailed evaluation. EAP coordinators will follow up to ensure you have been able to access services that addressed the difficulty you were experiencing.

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## Common Sleep Disorders

The 4 most common sleep disorders are insomnia, sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, and narcolepsy. Additional sleep problems include chronic insufficient sleep, circadian rhythm abnormalities, and "parasomnias" such as sleep walking, sleep paralysis, and night terrors.

You may have a sleep disorder and should see your doctor if you are experiencing any of the following:

ˆ You consistently take more than 30 minutes each night to fall asleep.

ˆ You consistently awaken more than a few times or for long periods of time each night.

ˆ You take frequent naps.

ˆ You often feel sleepy during the day - or you fall asleep at inappropriate times during the day.

Contact your local IAM EAP representative if you are experiencing any of these symptoms for an appropriate referral