How to establish a sleep routine for better health

Not sleeping well can mean a multitude of things. Are you having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, getting a restful sleep, or waking too early? Investigating and improving on sleep is very important for overall quality of life and also long-term health.

Chronic sleep loss has been linked to diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and immune system impairment. In general, routinely getting less than six hours of solid sleep affects mood, memory, and reaction times, which can lead to depression and anxiety, as well as making more mistakes or being in an accident.

A sleep routine is a good first step in getting your sleep on track. This means waking up and going to bed at the same times every day. We're all tempted to sleep in on the weekends, but a better strategy is to get up at your usual time and, instead work in a short nap early in the afternoon in-between classes if possible. The same routine will help you feel more refreshed than simply getting the same number of hours of sleep per night.

Establish a bedtime routine

Before you go to bed, perform this routine in the same order every night in order to tell your body and brain that it's time for sleep.

Try and eat dinner at least three hours before bed, but have a light snack if you're hungry later on.

Keep the lights on low in the evening. Turn off all electrical devices such as computers, tablets, and televisions 1.5 hours before bed time. The light emitted from electronic screens interferes with sleep by affecting sleep-hormone production and stimulating the nervous system.

Closer to bedtime, work in some form of relaxation such as light stretching, deep breathing, a warm bath, or reading. If emotional stress is an issue, try journaling before bed or if your to-do list is keeping you up at night, write your to-do tasks down to unload your brain but do not engage in problem solving until the next day.

Rest easier knowing that a solid sleep routine is a good start to any sleeping challenge. Once you have your sleep routine in place, you then can see what sleep issues, if any, remain.