Don’t Be a Sleep Slouch

Do you routinely get seven to nine hours of sleep per night? If you answered no, you are by no means alone. The World Health Organization and the National Sleep Foundation report that 2/3 of adults in developed nations fail to get this recommended amount of nightly sleep. So what, you say? Well, did you know that sleeping less than six to seven hours per night on a regular basis puts you at increased risk for developing a whole laundry list of chronic health conditions including but not limited to obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, mood disorders and Alzheimer’s disease?

Still not convinced of how important it is to make sleep a priority? Did you know that sleep serves a vital role in learning and memory? It both prepares the brain for learning and secures the learning as memory to prevent forgetting. In a study done at the University of St Thomas in St Paul, MN, researchers found that for each additional day per week that a college student slept poorly or not enough, their likelihood of dropping a course rose by 10% and their grade point average fell by 0.02. Not only do our cognitive abilities decline with limited sleep but also our physical performance. Numerous studies have shown that getting regular quality sleep improves the motor skills of athletes across all sports. Conversely, not getting enough sleep not only worsens athletic performance, but also predicts a much higher likelihood of sustaining a sports-related injury.

Ah, you say, but what about our good friend caffeine that helps to keep us awake and alert? As a stimulant, caffeine will indeed impede your ability to sleep by blocking the effect of the brain chemical that is responsible for making us sleepy. However, your ability to learn and perform remains impaired and once the caffeine is eventually cleared from your body, you will experience a “caffeine crash” imposed by this sleepiness chemical that has continued to build-up in your brain.

OK, you say; you’re convinced. Sleep is important. But what if sleep just doesn’t come easily to you? The American Academy of Sleep Medicine offers these suggestions:

- Go to bed and get up every day at approximately the same time, even on weekends.
- Keep your bedroom or dorm room quiet, dark and cool for sleeping.
- Avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime. Instead, follow a consistent bedtime routine that includes a calming activity like listening to soothing music or meditating.
- Don’t eat a big meal or skip a meal before bedtime and don’t consume foods or drinks that contain caffeine at least 3 hours before bedtime.
- If possible, keep all electronic devices outside the bedroom. If not possible, avoid using them prior to bedtime.
- Say no to all-nighters and staying-up late to cram for an exam or finish homework. It is counter-productive to your learning.

If these sleep hygiene practices alone are not doing the trick and you are still finding yourself sleep deprived, there may be any number of reasons that sleep may remain elusive. Don’t suffer in silence. The capable and caring staff at Health & Counseling Services can help you with identifying the cause of your sleep problems as well as connecting you to resources that can assist you in getting back on track. Call 780-4050 or 780-5411 to make your appointment today!