

# Sleep Hygiene Tips from Blue Ridge Pain Management

At some point, most people have difficulty sleeping. For most people, this is a temporary phenomenon related to important events occurring in their lives. Other people feel as if they have never been able to get a good night's sleep.

## **There are some background facts worth remembering:**

- Different people require different amounts of sleep, usually within the range of 5-10 hours a day. What is enough sleep for one person, will be insufficient for another. In addition, with advancing age people need less sleep, so cannot expect to sleep as long as they did when younger.
- If you cannot fall asleep you eventually will. Your body needs sleep. Whether it is later that night, or on a subsequent night you are likely to fall asleep.
- Sleeping tablets such as the benzodiazepines do have a very limited role in sleep disorders, but they can produce a phenomenon called 'rebound insomnia'. This means when you stop taking a sleeping tablet your insomnia may become worse than it was originally.

## **There are a number of common sense tips that may help your sleeping:**

- **Have a comfortable sleeping environment** - This may require a good supportive mattress and a well ventilated room that is not too warm or too cold.
- **Establish a regular sleep-wake cycle** - It helps to have a similar bed-time and wake-up time on most days, possibly including weekends. Although sleep-ins are enjoyable for most, they can delay your sleep-wake cycle, so that if you regularly wake-up later you are likely to fall asleep later too. A 'sleep routine' may include regular activities leading up to bed-time, e.g. showering, brushing teeth, which all may promote sleep and relaxation.
- **Avoid day time naps** - If you cannot sleep at night it may be because you are getting some of your sleeping done during the day time. If you have had a bad nights sleep it is preferable to stay awake right through to the following evening rather than catching up through day time naps.
- **Avoid taking drugs before bed-time that will stimulate your nervous system** - The common drugs that cause problems are caffeine (coffee, tea, cola drinks) and nicotine (cigarettes). Although alcohol is a drug which depresses the nervous system, it can disrupt the sleep-wake cycle in the early hours of the morning and therefore your intake of alcohol during the day may need to be reduced. For some people, consumption of caffeine may need to stop up to 12 hours before bed-time.
- **Do not exercise before bed-time** - This can similarly have an alerting effect, although exercise earlier in the day can be helpful to increase physical tiredness.
- **If you cannot sleep, try not to worry about it** - As mentioned above, your body will eventually demand sleep. It is preferable to do things if you cannot sleep - such as read or watch television - until you feel sufficiently tired that you need to go back to bed. Lying in bed trying to make yourself sleep will only make you even more alert, worried, annoyed and therefore, less able to sleep.