

ESTABLISHING HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS



Do you have chronic pain and sleeping problems?

If it's any comfort, you're not alone. People with chronic pain often have trouble sleeping or staying asleep, wake up too soon, or feel like they never seem to get enough sleep. To improve the situation, adopt a few simple measures that cultivate good sleeping habits.

Chronic pain and sleeping problems often create a vicious circle, with pain troubling sleep and sleepiness increasing the perception of pain. In other words, after a poor night of sleep, your pain is often stronger during the day, and the pain makes it more difficult to have a deep, restorative slumber that night.



There are a few simple – but not altogether obvious – ways to improve the quality of your sleep. By practicing one or more of these tactics on a daily basis, you'll sleep better and be less troubled by pain.

Bedroom = sleep: CONDITION YOUR BRAIN!

- Use your bedroom for sleeping and sexual relations only. Do not read, eat or watch television in bed.
- Wait until you're really tired before going to bed. Avoid going to bed because it's your usual bedtime or because the person with whom you usually sleep is doing so.
- Establish and maintain a ritual by performing the same actions in the same order before you go to bed – for example: undress first, then brush your teeth, use the toilet, etc.

- If you can't fall asleep or if you wake up in the middle of the night, don't stay in bed. Get up, leave your bedroom and engage in an activity that fully captures your attention, such as reading. Don't go back to bed until you're really tired.
- Don't lounge about in bed in the morning. Get up when you wake up, and leave your bedroom.
- If you feel pain during the day, try to avoid going to sleep on your bed. If you must lie down, find another quiet comfortable spot to do so.

Regularize your sleep-wake cycle

- In order to synchronize your sleep-wake cycle, maintain a regular timetable for going to bed and waking up, even on weekends or if you slept poorly.
- Get lots of light during the day, and make sure your environment is well lit throughout the evening, too.
- Keep daytime naps down to a half hour or less, to avoid disturbing your sleep-wake cycle.



Make your environment conducive to sleep

- We sleep best in a dark or dimly lit, calm environment where we feel comfortable.
- It's worth investing in a good mattress and comfortable pillow.
- Air out your bedroom, and keep it around 18 to 20°C.
- If you live in a noisy environment, use earplugs or get a white noise device to cover up background noise that won't let you sleep or noises that could startle you awake.
- At night, turn your alarm-clock face to the wall, and avoid thinking about the time going by while you're waiting to fall asleep.

Get enough physical exercise and relaxation

- Physical exercise during the day or early in the evening will help you feel more tired at bedtime.
- Avoid engaging in active exercise or sports during the two hours before bedtime.
- A few hours before bedtime, stop doing any stressful or stimulating activities.
- In the evening, relaxing activities like reading or listening to calm music are called for.
- One or two hours before going to bed – but not immediately before – take a hot, relaxing bath.

Avoid some substances, such as:

- Products that contain caffeine during the afternoon or evening.
- Alcohol during the evening. Alcohol disturbs certain sleep phases and awakens you when it's eliminated from your bloodstream.
- Cigarettes at night. Don't smoke for several hours before going to bed, and do not smoke if you wake up in the middle of the night.
- Heavy meals and spicy foods within two hours of going to bed. Also, try to maintain regular mealtimes.
- Liquids in large quantities throughout the evening. That way, you won't have to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom.

Take your medicine as prescribed

- Ask your pharmacist whether some of the medication you're taking may be stimulants that would make it difficult to sleep, and if so, whether you can take them at a better time.
- Make sure your pain is under control at night so it's not depriving you of sleep. Speak with your doctor about the possibility of adjusting your pain medicine to that end.
- Be extremely careful about prescription sleeping pills. Only take them on the advice of your doctor, and remember it's better to use them in small quantities and just for a limited time.
- There is a lot of insomnia medicine available over-the-counter at your pharmacy. Talk to your pharmacist about these products in order to determine which are the most effective, and which ones could interact negatively with any other medication you may be taking.

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This brochure was produced by the ACCORD team – Working together for the management of chronic pain.

For more information about chronic pain, go to www.chronicpainquebec.org or contact l'Association québécoise de la douleur chronique (AQDC) at 514.355.4198

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