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12 Tips on Sleep and Early Recovery

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A common issue in the early days, weeks and even months of recovery is that of sleep. It is helpful if professional helpers monitor sleep issues during this time as they can be a good indicator of early recovery adjustment or offer clues to vulnerability for relapse. The following checklist will help with this assessment.

Sleep Assessment

Have you had any of the following problems since you stopped your alcohol and drug use?

- Difficulty getting to sleep
- Awakening and having difficulty getting back to sleep
- Poor sleep environment
- Racing thoughts that disrupt ability to sleep
- Lack of feeling refreshed after sleep
- Tiredness and drowsiness during the day
- Falling asleep during the day
- Disturbing dreams
- Excessive hours of sleeping

Essential Information

- Sleep disturbances are common in early recovery and, in the early days and weeks, are part of the post-acute withdrawal process.
- Your body must reestablish regular sleep cycles in the absence of alcohol and drugs.
- Most sleep problems in early recovery resolve themselves without medical treatment.
- Your sleep requirements may change in the transition from addiction to recovery; this adjustment period may take several weeks/months to re-stabilize.
- If sleep problems persist, seek medical attention.
- Avoid self-medication with prescribed and over-the-counter sleep aids unless this is supervised by a physician trained in addiction medicine.
- Dreams/nightmares involving scenes of alcohol/drug intoxication are common in early recovery.

12 Sleeping Tips for Early Recovery

1. Create a good sleeping environment, e.g., bed comfort, quietness, darkness, comfortable temperature, and ventilation
2. Consider a white noise generator if there is a problem with noise in the environment.
3. Set a consistent time period for going to bed and getting up, including on weekends
4. Avoid daytime naps
5. Eliminate or reduce caffeine intake (particularly after 3 pm)
6. Get exercise early in the day, but avoid exercise in the evening
7. Keep a sleep diary by your bed, noting sleep patterns, troublesome thoughts, dreams, etc. and discuss troublesome dreams with your counselor, sponsor or others in recovery.
8. Learn and utilized relaxation techniques, e.g., progressive relaxation, visualization, breathing exercises; use recovery prayers and self-talk (slogans) as an aid in getting to sleep.
9. Minimize activities other than sleeping in your bed, e.g., eating, working, watching television, reading, etc.
10. Avoid large, late meals; have a light snack before bedtime—some that can actually aid sleep, e.g., small turkey sandwich, warm milk, a banana, a cup of hot chamomile tea
11. Create a consistent bedtime routine and stick with it.
12. If you can't get to sleep within 30 minutes, get out of bed and do something relaxing in low light until you feel sleepy.