



ASK THE EXPERT

How to Sweeten Your Slumber

DR. BROOKE JUDD

DIRECTOR, SLEEP DISORDERS CENTER AT DARTMOUTH

Sleep disorders affect more than 60 million Americans: An estimated 44 percent of the U.S. population experiences some kind of sleeping difficulty on a regular basis. Doctors at the Sleep Disorder Center at Dartmouth, the third oldest sleep center in the country, help patients overcome their problems. Judd says that many sleeping problems stem not from disorders but from poor sleep hygiene. If you have trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep or finding your sleep refreshing, try these simple solutions.

—*Rianna P. Starheim '14*

NO MATTRESS MULTITASKING

“Your sleeping environment is an important part of training your body to get to sleep and stay asleep. Make your bedroom a quiet and relaxing place by keeping it cool and dark, without distractions. The bed should be used for sleep and sex only—other activities, such as watching TV, paying bills or playing on the computer, can confuse the body and make it more difficult to fall asleep when you’re ready for bed.”

ESTABLISH A REGULAR ROUTINE

“A regular sleep schedule is vital to getting to sleep and sleeping well. This means getting up and going to sleep at a roughly consistent time each day. The time you wake up in the morning governs your sleep schedule, so it is especially important to wake up around the same time each day—even if you have a late night. Avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime and try setting a nighttime routine to train your body to know when it is time to sleep at night.”

BEWARE OF CAFFEINE

“Many people think they’re okay with six hours of sleep, but most adults need an average of seven and a half to eight hours of sleep each sleep period. An extra cup of coffee is not the equivalent of an extra hour of sleep. Not getting enough sleep leads to drowsiness and inefficiency throughout the day, and drinking too much caffeine can perpetuate sleep issues by making it difficult to fall asleep when sleep is needed.”

STUDY YOUR SHUT-EYE

“If you have an ongoing sleep disturbance, an overnight sleep study, in which sleep, breathing, muscle activity and heart rate are monitored, may be the next appropriate step to evaluate your issues. Most sleep disorders have treatments once they’re identified, and medication is not the only option. For example, many patients find that cognitive behavioral therapy—a behavioral retraining in how to sleep and think about sleep—is effective in reducing their insomnia.”