



Is Pain Keeping You Up at Night, Making You Sleepy at Work?

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Financial worries. Work stress. Relationship issues. Aches and pains. All of these things occasionally can cause the average working professional to toss and turn at night. But adults experiencing chronic pain often also may suffer from persistent insomnia, which in turn may have a devastating impact on job performance and quality of life. In fact, approximately 20 percent of adult Americans reported in a study by the National Sleep Foundation that pain from headaches, back strain or arthritis interferes with their sleep several nights or more each week.

Inadequate sleep and sleep deprivation frequently result in fatigue, difficulty concentrating, coordination problems, irritability and the increased likelihood of injury, illness or depression. Recurring sleep problems caused by medical conditions such as chronic pain correlate with compromised mental health, diminished productivity and work quality, and greater use of health care services. For U.S. companies, poor sleep patterns carry the staggering price tag of more than \$136 billion per year in lost worker productivity, according to the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

For people who are not sleeping at night because of pain, it's important to address the underlying causes. It can become a vicious cycle. Pain leads to less sleep. And less sleep means your body doesn't have the opportunity to heal, which leads to more pain. In fact, sleep deprivation is considered a possible cause of fibromyalgia.

A health care professional can evaluate pain symptoms as well as sleep schedules and habits. A doctor also may suggest medications or other treatment options to address pain accompanied by sleeplessness. In addition to pain, other causes of poor sleep – including sleep apnea – need to be evaluated by a physician. If left untreated, sleep apnea can result in more serious health problems, including heart disease.

In addition to having a medical evaluation, adopting healthy sleep strategies can lead to improvements in work productivity.

Strategies for Healthy Sleep

Altering habits that may be sabotaging your sleep may help you awaken feeling refreshed, energized and ready for a productive day at work.

1. Create the right environment for sleep. A bedroom should be used only for sleep and

intimacy. Take the computer, PDA and television out of the room. Light sleepers may find that a bedside fan, white-noise machine or ear plugs can block out distracting noises. Room-darkening shades will help those with light sensitivity.

2. Invest in a comfortable bed. Sleeping on a high-quality mattress with good support may resolve some back and neck problems. In addition, using pillows under or between the knees can relieve stress on the lower back.
3. Bedtime routines are not just for children. Adults also benefit from keeping regular bed times and using "unwinding rituals" such as taking warm baths or reading. Waking at the same time every day—even on weekends—also helps reinforce a healthy sleep cycle.
4. Avoid taking naps after work. Napping late in the day will disrupt your sleep cycle. Even on weekends, limit naps to the early afternoon for no more than 15 to 20 minutes.
5. Exercise regularly and early in the day to reduce stress and promote deeper sleep at night. Be careful about exercising late in the evening, because it energizes the body and can make falling asleep more difficult. Light stretching before bed, however, will relieve muscle and joint pain and make it easier to relax.
6. Avoid eating or drinking right before bedtime, so the body has adequate time to digest its food. Caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and spicy foods are known to disrupt sleep patterns. A warm, non-caffeinated beverage an hour before bedtime, however, can help one relax.

Adopting healthy sleep habits and behaviors will improve the sleep experience. And getting the right amount of quality sleep each night will impact not only work productivity and performance, but also overall health and quality of life.