

**If you have trouble sleeping or are worried about your sleep, talk to a health professional (psychologist, physician) who can answer your questions and, if appropriate, initiate treatment with or without medication.**

#### References:

- Canadian Sleep Society: [www.canadiansleepsociety.ca](http://www.canadiansleepsociety.ca) (information brochures)
- National Sleep Foundation: [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)
- Overcoming Insomnia: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Approach, Workbook (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), by Jack D. Edinger and Colleen E. Carney, Oxford University Press, 2014.

#### Financial support:

- The development of this brochure was supported by a grant from the Consortium for the development of research in traumatology of the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé (FRQS) awarded to Marie-Christine Ouellet Ph.D. (Researcher, Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en réadaptation et intégration sociale, Québec, QC, Canada; Professor, École de psychologie, Université Laval, Québec, QC, Canada).

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Brochure produced by the CLIPP.

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## Some Myths About Sleep

**“I need 8 hours of sleep per night to function during the day.”**

Sleep needs are very different from one person to another: some people only need 5 or 6 hours of sleep per night, while others need to sleep 9 or 10 hours to feel rested.

**“It is normal to have insomnia when aging.”**

With age, it is normal to awaken more easily during the night, to have a lighter sleep, or to wake up earlier in the morning. However, age does not necessarily lead to difficulty falling asleep at night or falling back asleep after awakening during the night. People of any age can use similar strategies to counter insomnia.

**“Medication is the only solution for insomnia.”**

Some sleeping pills can be effective for short-term insomnia. However, beyond a few weeks, their efficacy diminishes and adverse effects can arise. Moreover, some medications prescribed for sleep are not recommended for use after a traumatic brain injury. If you use sleeping pills, you should also integrate some daily behaviours that can help your sleep cycle, such as those suggested in this brochure.

Before beginning or discontinuing a sleep medication for sleep, or if you have any questions regarding the medication you take, talk to your doctor or your pharmacist: it is very important to proceed gradually and to be supervised by a healthcare professional.



## Fatigue or Sleepiness?

### ▪ Sleepiness is a transitional state towards sleep.

Yawning, nodding off, having itchy eyes, and dozing off while reading or watching TV are all signs of sleepiness.

### ▪ Fatigue is not necessarily associated to the need for sleep.

Lacking energy and feeling exhausted or weary are signs of fatigue or tiredness.

When you are tired but not sleepy, it is not essential to sleep. For instance, you can get some rest by listening to music or taking a walk.

### ▪ For a better management of fatigue:

Alternate between different types of activities.  
Divide the activities you have to do into smaller steps.

### ▪ Your treatment team can help you to better manage your energy, do not hesitate to discuss this issue with them.

**Being tired is not  
the same as  
being sleepy!**

# Sleep During Recovery After a Traumatic Brain Injury



**Strategies to promote  
healthy sleep habits  
during rehabilitation**

# The Sleeping Environment

A care unit is not always conducive to good sleep habits, either because of the presence of roommates or because of medical routines.

- Expose yourself to bright light during the day and make sure you are in a dark environment during the night. This increases light contrasts and facilitates the natural cycle of sleep and wakefulness.
- If light interferes with your sleep, ensure that the curtains are drawn in your room. You can also use an eye mask.
- If you are disturbed by noise, the use of earplugs can be a temporary solution.
- When you are unable to sleep during the night, go to the common areas to avoid disturbing your roommates, and engage in a relaxing activity (ex.: reading, listening to music).
- Remember to be tolerant of other patients who can be noisy because of a vulnerable state, and with medical staff who have to meet a large number of needs. Feelings of frustration or anger can affect your sleep. You should discuss any dissatisfaction with your treatment team, who can help you find possible solutions.



# Time Spent in Bed

- If you have difficulty falling or staying asleep, spending too much time in bed without sleeping can affect the quality and efficacy of your sleep.
- Go to bed only when you plan to sleep.
- If you do not plan to sleep, sit in a chair rather than in your bed (ex.: for activities such as reading, watching TV).
- During the day, take a nap only if you feel sleepy, and for a short period of time (20-30 minutes).
- Avoid napping after 3:00 pm, especially if you have difficulty falling or staying asleep at night.

# Stress and Worry

As rehabilitation can be a stressful situation for you and your family, concerns about your health or your future may contribute to keeping you awake during the night.

- Try to avoid thinking about your concerns or engaging in problem solving close to bedtime. Instead, try blocking out a period of time during the day to think about these issues.
- Keep a paper to write down any concerns or things you do not want to forget (ex.: questions to ask to your doctor). Once they are noted, you are less likely to feel the need to think about them.
- While you are in bed, try letting your thoughts pass by without giving them particular attention. Instead, breathe slowly and focus your attention on the sensations of your breathing.

# Routine and Sleep Schedule

- Allow at least one hour before bedtime to unwind, and engage in calming activities, which should take place out of bed (ex.: in common areas, sitting in a chair in your room).
- Avoid stimulating activities before bedtime or during the night (ex.: playing video games, watching a thriller).
- Try to establish a routine by repeating the same sequence of behaviours every evening before going to bed. By doing so, you send a message to your body that it is time to sleep.
- As much as possible, keep a regular schedule. Try to go to bed and arise at the same time everyday.

Establish a Routine



# Things to Avoid

Coffee, tea, some soft drinks (ex.: cola), chocolate, several energy drinks, and some medications contain caffeine.

- Avoid caffeinated products at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime and throughout the night.
- Choose decaffeinated versions of your favourite products.

Even if smoking a cigarette can seem relaxing, nicotine is a stimulant for the body and it can affect sleep.

- Avoid smoking in the hours before going to bed and throughout the night.
- If the urge to smoke is too strong, try to engage in another activity (ex.: chewing gum, drinking a decaffeinated beverage, listening to music).

Alcohol can slow brain recovery. Moreover, when alcohol is used during the evening, it can affect sleep and cause awakenings or a lighter sleep towards the end of the night.

- Avoid using alcohol, especially in the first year following your traumatic brain injury.

