Sleep and the Holidays

**Holiday Time: Get Enough Sleep!**

With the winter holidays arriving, it’s important to keep yourself healthy during this festive, though often challenging, time. One of the key gifts you can give yourself is to get enough sleep. When you are navigating a packed schedule (with occasional odd hours) plus your to-do lists, it’s easy to get run down.

Here are some tips for getting enough rest:

*Keep as normal a schedule as possible.* Try to schedule your obligations and events evenly so that you’re not frequently staying up late.

*Get started early on your to-dos.* Don’t leave the bulk of your holiday task lists to the last minute. If you do, you’ll be facing more fatigue and stress brought on by long hours. Holiday shopping is something you can start early or cut back, depending on your budget.

*Be efficient as possible.* When shopping, take advantage of online ordering and non-peak hours shopping at stores so you can save time.

*Don’t over-schedule.* Be choosy about the invitations you accept. Make sure your family isn’t obligated to attend too many late-hour festivities.

*Stay with your healthy habits.* Getting some regular exercise and eating carefully throughout the season will help you stay balanced and ready to sleep comfortably.

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Sleep Keeps You Well

The quality and quantity of your sleep is a big part of your overall wellness. When you’re sleeping well, things go more smoothly. When you’re losing sleep for some reason, it takes a toll on you both mentally and physically. Sleep-deprived people perform poorly in almost all areas. While we sleep, our bodies secrete hormones that positively affect our mood, energy, memory, and concentration. Here are some suggestions for good sleep.

**Take action if you suffer with insomnia.** Most people experience short-term insomnia at some time. Insomnia includes having trouble falling asleep, having trouble getting back to sleep, and waking up too early. Temporary insomnia can be caused by noise or a stressful event. But if insomnia goes on night after night, you should see a doctor.

Be careful with medications. Certain medications can keep you awake, particularly those that treat colds and allergies, heart disease, high blood pressure, and pain. It’s wise to read labels carefully and check with your doctor before using over-the-counter sleep medicines for short-term insomnia.

Deal with daytime sleepiness. Feeling tired every now and then during the day is normal. But it’s not normal for sleepiness to interfere with your regular daytime activities. It is not normal to doze off or have trouble paying attention during the day. Make a commitment to get enough sleep each night.

Control your pre-bedtime hours. Avoid caffeine and alcohol four to six hours before bedtime. Don’t eat large meals within two hours of bedtime. Also, don’t exercise within two hours of bedtime; exercising earlier can help you sleep more soundly.

Follow regular bedtime routines. Do the same things each night to tell your body that it’s time to wind down. Try a relaxing pre-sleep ritual such as a warm bath, soft music, or reading.

Children and Sleep Issues

Regardless of their age, most children have problems sleeping at some point. Sleep issues are complicated and have many causes. They’re hard to deal with because when children aren’t sleeping, parents aren’t sleeping—everyone’s affected. Here are some tips that might help you and your children:

- **Maintain a consistent bedtime and wakeup time for your child.** This helps you “set” your child’s biological clock to function more smoothly.

- **Follow a regular bedtime routine.** Routines create security. A peaceful bedtime routine in the same order each night (e.g., bath, pajamas, brushing teeth, story time) helps your child transition from the motion of the day to tranquil sleepiness.

- **Provide the right nutrition.** Foods affect sleepiness. Carbohydrates can have a calming effect on the body, while foods high in protein or sugar generate alertness, particularly when eaten alone.

- **Help your child to be healthy and fit.** Many children don’t get enough daily physical activity. Too much TV watching and a lack of exercise prevent good sleep.

- **Teach your child how to relax.** Maintaining an evening routine such as reading stories can help your child become still and sleepy. Unplug the electronics an hour or two prior to bedtime.
Goal Setting for the New Year

As the calendar rolls over to 2013, it’s a good time to regroup and set out some fresh goals for the upcoming year. Try to take some time to think about what you really want to accomplish next year. Then come up with a plan for meeting your goals. Here are some practical guidelines for making—and keeping—effective New Year’s resolutions.

Be realistic. Read a book a week, lose 30 pounds, save $1,000 each month—setting high standards is important, but only when achievable. Don’t set yourself up for failure. Instead, think realistically about what you can accomplish in the coming year.

Be specific. Use dates, times, amounts—any form of measurement that helps you establish specific goals. Avoid vague words like “some,” “soon,” and “a few.” Instead of resolving to spend “more time” with your family, for example, plan to participate in “at least one recreational activity each month.”

Be positive. Avoid negatives like “won’t” and “don’t,” and conditional words like “might” and “if.” A positive approach works better. Instead of resolving to “stop arguing with my friends,” vow to be open-minded and diplomatic when you have differences of opinion.

Do it for yourself, not for others. Make sure that your New Year’s resolutions are truly yours. Before you vow to fit into a size 6 dress, run a marathon, or build that addition on the back of the house, stop and ask yourself these questions:

• What will be the effects of making this resolution? How will it change my life?
• Will my resolution make me happier, healthier or more productive?
• Am I doing this solely to please someone else, or am I doing it because I really want to?

Put it in writing. Writing down your New Year’s resolutions will help you 1) maintain a clear sense of what you’re trying to accomplish, and 2) chart your progress. Try using a calendar or “to-do” list, and post it prominently.

Appreciating Others’ Holiday Traditions

The winter holidays offer a unique gift: the opportunity to celebrate our country’s diversity. At no other time of year do so many different religious and cultural holidays occur in such a short span. While each of us honors our own practices, it’s also important to respect others’ traditions. Our workplaces are filled with people from various religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The following suggestions can help everyone feel included during the holidays.

Be sensitive. Learn about holiday practices different from your own. Be aware that some religions do not celebrate holidays—even birthdays.

Understand differences. Many groups celebrate the same holiday but not in the same way. Almost every culture and religion sets aside a special time to remember its beginning. But those holidays may be at different times of the year.

Be inclusive. In the workplace, find ways to celebrate together. For example, your group could collect items for a local food drive or needy family. Throw a holiday party that makes room for different cultural practices by inviting guests to bring a sample of their favorite traditional holiday food.