

HEALTH

Defeating Insomnia

By Dr. Charles W. Faulkner
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dear Dr. Faulkner:

I have been having a very difficult time sleeping. It is hard for me to go to sleep at night. I usually wake up at two or three a.m., and cannot go back to sleep. Do you have advice?

— Mrs. Brown, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mrs. Brown:

You are suffering from what is known as insomnia, an inability to sleep. This condition is quite common and is usually attributed to a physical disorder or a psychological problem. Some very chronic cases may be caused by both of these difficulties.

If a physical cause of insomnia is present, a physician may suggest that you take one of several types of medicines used to induce sleep. You should be cautioned, however, against using any medicine without a doctor's prescription. Also, medicines used to induce sleep can cause either a physical or psychological addiction.

Research has shown that medicines of this type accumulate in the body and tend to be recurrent in their effect. People have been known to fall asleep at the wheel of their cars several days after taking sleep-inducing medicines.

Personal problems may also be at the root of sleeplessness. The person who carries problems home from work to bed, who allows family problems to linger while trying to sleep, or who constantly worries, is likely to be a prime candidate for insomnia.

Following are some suggestions that may help you to overcome insomnia: avoid naps - sleep only at bedtime; change the setting by sleeping in another room; take a few days off from your job and get away from the daily stresses and tensions; do not eat a heavy meal prior to bedtime; and exercise and eliminate excess nervous energy.

Dear Dr. Faulkner:

It is sometimes hard for me to get a complete night's sleep. My life is fast, furious and full of difficulties. What can I do?

— W. Stone, Omaha, Neb.

Dear Mr. Stone:

First, you should see your doctor. Next, you must make an effort to put your life in perspective by realizing that to get a complete night's sleep might be impossible as long as your life remains fast, furious and full of difficulties.

So, slow down and logically resolve the difficulties in your life. The idea of a "complete night's sleep" is ambiguous simply because some people require less sleep than others. If you do not get eight hours of sleep at night and do not feel sleepy during the day, you may be getting all of the sleep that you need.

Try the following: (1) Do not try to go to sleep. If you're not sleepy, get out of bed and find something interesting to do (2) Do not stay in bed for more than 15 minutes if you cannot go to sleep. Get up and try step no. 1 again. (3) While lying in bed, do deep breathing exercises and think about the most pleasant activities of your life - a vacation, a trip to the mountains, or a visit with good friends. Do not think about sleep.

Write to Dr. Faulkner at: 5722 Green Street, Suite 302, Philadelphia, PA, 19144.

Children's group offers safety tips

Special to Sentinel-Voice

As many expectant parents anticipate bringing home their newborn, thoughts of nursery decorations, baby furniture and crib toys are often top of mind.

However, parents need to know that the home can be filled with many hidden hazards for their newborn.

Each year, nearly 2,700 children ages 14 and under die, and nearly 4.5 million are injured from unintentional injury in the home. More than 70 percent of the deaths occur among children ages 4 and under making it important for parents to keep safety in mind when preparing the nursery for their baby.

"In wanting to provide an entertaining, attractive and loving nursery, parents sometimes forget to take safety into consideration," said Barbara Ludwig, director of the Clark County SAFE KIDS Coalition. "Parents should be careful both in the selection of furniture and decorations, including the arrangements and use."

In observance of September's Baby Safety Month, the coalition offers the following suggestions to help give your baby a healthy and safe start:

Walls — If you live in a house or apartment built before 1978, a lead abatement professional should check any painted walls for lead. Your child can get lead poisoning if he or she breathes lead dust or fumes or swallows anything with lead in it. Lead poisoning in children can cause learning disabilities, hyperactivity and other neurological problems.

Floors — Smooth, washable floors are recommended in nurseries because they are easier to keep clean.

The crib — According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, approximately 50 infants die each year from crib-related incidents. Recommendations include:

- Purchasing a crib that has been certified to meet national safety standards.

- Choosing a crib with no more than 2-3/8 inches of space between the slats or the spindles.

- Testing the drop side latches to assure the baby cannot open them.

- Always keeping the side rail locked in its top position when the baby is in the crib.

- Using bumper pads to keep the child from hitting the side of the crib.

- Do not use a crib that has cornerpost extensions or protrusions greater than 1/16 inch, including decorative knobs. Infants might catch their clothing and strangle.

- Never use a pillow in the crib.

- Do not place cribs near radiators, heating vents, windows, venetian blind strings, drapery cords or other hanging strings.

- Make sure no plastic bags or other plastic materials are in or around the crib that might cover the child's nose and mouth and cause suffocation.

The mattress — Mattresses must fit snugly against all four sides of the crib. If you can fit more than two fingers between the edge

of the mattress and the crib, then the mattress is too small. A baby can suffocate if his or her head is trapped between the mattress and crib. Check regularly to ensure that all four mattress support hangers are securely held in hooks attached to the cornerposts.

Dressers, chests and changing tables — Whatever type of furniture you plan to purchase or borrow, keep the following in mind:

- Do not use any furniture with sharp edges.

- Use a changing table with safety straps to secure your baby.

- Avoid turning your back on your baby to reach for supplies.

- Consider using large plastic bins or open bookshelves for storage.

Crib toys and mobiles — Avoid strings on any product for your baby, including pacifiers and rattles.

- Beware of toys and

mobiles with small detachable parts that can be easily removed and swallowed.

- Remove all toys from the crib when your child is asleep.

- Take out all toys and other objects that he or she could use to climb out of the crib as soon as your baby can pull to a standing position.

- Remove mobiles as soon as your child can push up on his or her hands and knees.

Childproof the room — Pick small objects off the floors and place out of baby's reach.

- Use safety covers for all electrical outlets.

- Remove all furniture with sharp edges.

- Install window guards on all windows that are not designated fire escape routes, especially if you live in a high-rise apartment building.

- Install window and cabinet locks.

- Keep electrical wires, lamps and lighting fixtures out of reach.

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