

Good sleep hygiene puts insomnia to rest

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Janelle Ricci hasn't been sleeping well. It's been more than a year, in fact, since she has had a decent night's sleep.

Ricci, 21, a design student at Burbank, Calif.'s Woodbury University, says pressure to perform can keep her up for days at a time. Her longest stretch was staying up for about 64 hours straight.

"It really affects my life," Ricci said. "I've started falling asleep at work. I sleep through my classes."

According to the Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention, about 75 million Americans — more than one-quarter of the population — say they don't get enough sleep. Almost 30 million say they have chronic insomnia.

This restlessness, the CDC warns, can contribute to illnesses and conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and depression.

It can also take an economic toll. Lack of slumber results in an average of 11.3 days, or \$2,280, in lost productivity per worker each year, and the total cost to the

nation is more than \$63 billion annually, according to a recent study by Harvard Medical School.

So what's a would-be sleeper to do?

Some people turn to quick fixes like Ambien, Lunesta or other prescription drugs. The research firm Global Industry Analysts estimated in a report last month that the worldwide market for sleeping pills will be worth \$9 billion by 2015.

But sleep experts say this merely places a Band-Aid on the problem. To achieve lasting results, they say, you have to address the causes

of sleeplessness and change your behavior accordingly.

In the sleep trade, this is known as having good sleep hygiene.

The CDC recommends avoiding caffeine, alcohol and nicotine anywhere near bedtime. It also advises skipping large meals and vigorous exercise as rock-a-bye time approaches.

A key element of good sleep hygiene is acclimating your body to a regular schedule. That means trying to go to bed and wake up around the same time every day.

The National Sleep Foun-

dation recommends turning your bedroom into "a cool, comfortable sleeping environment that is free of distractions."

The foundation also advises keeping a "worry book" next to the bed. If anxiety is keeping you up, write down what's on your mind, jot down a few ideas about how to cope with things, and then forget about everything until morning.

There's also a technique called "sleep restriction." If you get into bed and often toss and turn for an hour or more, start going to bed later

at night, while still getting up at the same hour each morning.

That may sound counterintuitive for someone who wants more sleep — and it certainly wipes you out for a while — but the idea is to provide deeper, more restful sleep by limiting your time under the covers to the hours you're actually catching Z's.

As you become more proficient at staying down, you gradually try to lengthen the amount of time in bed until you get closer to the seven or eight hours most experts say is preferable.

SLEEP FOUNDATION.ORG