

# VITAL

BAY AREA VITALITY & VIBRANCE

## Read it and **sleep**

Tossing and turning won't help you get a good night's rest, but our advice will

### Also:

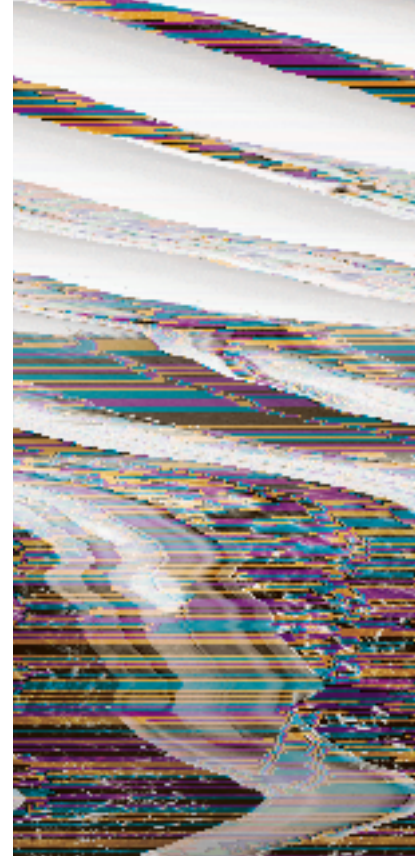
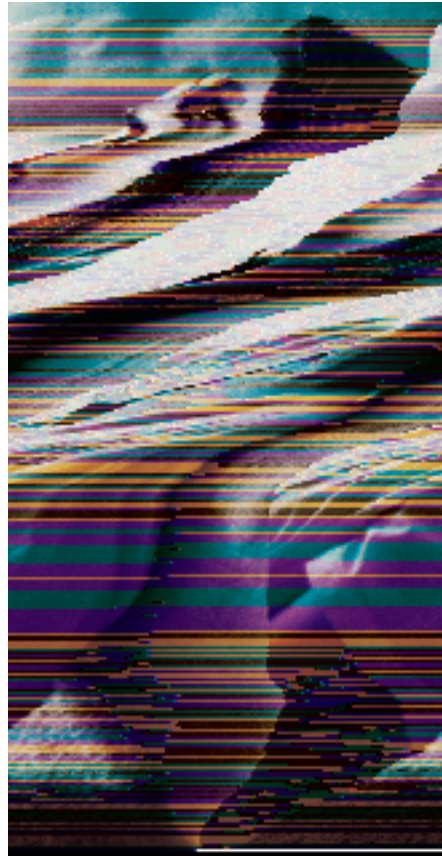
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# The no shut-eye blues



**Having trouble catching your Z's? Take steps to get a good night's rest.**

By Melinda Sacks | Photos by Norma Lopez Molina

Your husband's head has barely hit the pillow and already he's snoring away. Meanwhile, you lie next to him with eyes wide open, worrying about the kids, work, bills — and how you will get up in the morning if you can't get any sleep tonight.

Or, it's 3 a.m. and the glow from the alarm clock seems to be getting brighter by the minute. The harder you try to doze off, the more awake you feel. The odds of your being alert for that 8 a.m. meeting are not looking good.

Sound familiar? According to the National Sleep Foundation, nearly 40 percent of adults say they have some symptoms of insomnia within a given year. Lack of sleep, says Tara Nader, managing director of Bay Sleep Clinic, has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. And the results of poor sleep are far more significant than most people realize.

Insomnia, Latin for "no sleep," is defined by the non-profit National Sleep Foundation (NSF) as the inability to fall asleep or remain asleep. It is the most common sleep complaint

among Americans, 15 percent of whom say they suffer from chronic insomnia, which may drag on for weeks, months or even years.

"We need sleep to rejuvenate ourselves at night," says Nader, sitting in one of the sleep studies rooms of her Menlo Park clinic, where a queen-size bed complete with a teddy bear is part of the furnishings.

"Try not sleeping for a whole night and you are a zombie. More car accidents are caused by sleep deprivation than by alcohol intoxication," she says. "The more sleepy you are, the more dangerous you are. Not to mention the health risks of not getting enough sleep."

"People don't realize how serious it is to have sleep problems," continues Nader, whose clinics in Menlo Park, Los Gatos and San Francisco diagnose and treat a wide variety of related disorders. "Heart disease, high blood pressure, sexual dysfunction, stroke, poor mental health, obesity — all of them can be related to poor sleep."

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# SHUT-EYE

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Most people who suffer from insomnia find the problem plagues them for a few nights and then goes away for a while. Half of all those who experience it report that it is related to stress and worry, according to a 2004 national sleep survey conducted by NSF.

When it comes to shut-eye, however, the number of hours logged isn't the sole answer.

"An individual's sleep requirement depends on sleep quantity as well as sleep quality and timing," says Dr. Shanon Takaoka, a pulmonary/critical care physician and post-doctoral fellow at the Stanford Sleep Disorders Center. "Although existing data suggest that eight to nine hours of sleep is optimal for

many people," she says, "there is considerable variability in sleep length."

To figure out a person's requirements, Takaoka says it is important to know how long he or she would sleep if left to awaken on his/her own. It is also critical to notice how fatigued someone feels after different amounts of sleep. The goal is to obtain enough sleep to wake refreshed and be able to remain alert without effort through the day.

## Good sleep hygiene

To become a healthy sleeper, it's useful to think about sleep as part of overall personal hygiene. Just as we brush our teeth and try to eat a healthy diet, developing and maintaining good sleep habits will lead to better health, according to Takaoka.

For most people, following some simple steps can pave the way to a better night's repose:

### Before bed:

- Avoid alcohol. Even though it may help you fall asleep, it will wake you up in a couple of hours.
- Don't eat or drink a large amount within four hours of bedtime.
- Eliminate or reduce caffeine in your diet, especially during the last six

hours of the day.

- Get some exercise daily, but not within three or four hours of bedtime. Yoga, meditation and other forms of relaxation can also be very helpful.

- Take a warm shower to raise your body temperature. As your temperature falls after the shower it will help you become sleepy.

- Keep naps to no longer than one hour.

- If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep within 15 minutes, leave the bed and try reading or drinking a glass of warm milk until you are sleepy again.

- When you wake up in the morning, look at light. It will help you awaken.

### In the bedroom:

- Use the bed and bedroom for sleep and sex only. If you want to read or watch TV, do it in another room.

- Establish a regular bedtime routine and a regular wake-up schedule and stick to them even on weekends (within an hour or two at most).

- Keep the temperature down in the bedroom.

- Block out light and sound. Try an eye pillow or earplugs.

- Consider using a fan or white noise machine or play very soft, calming music.

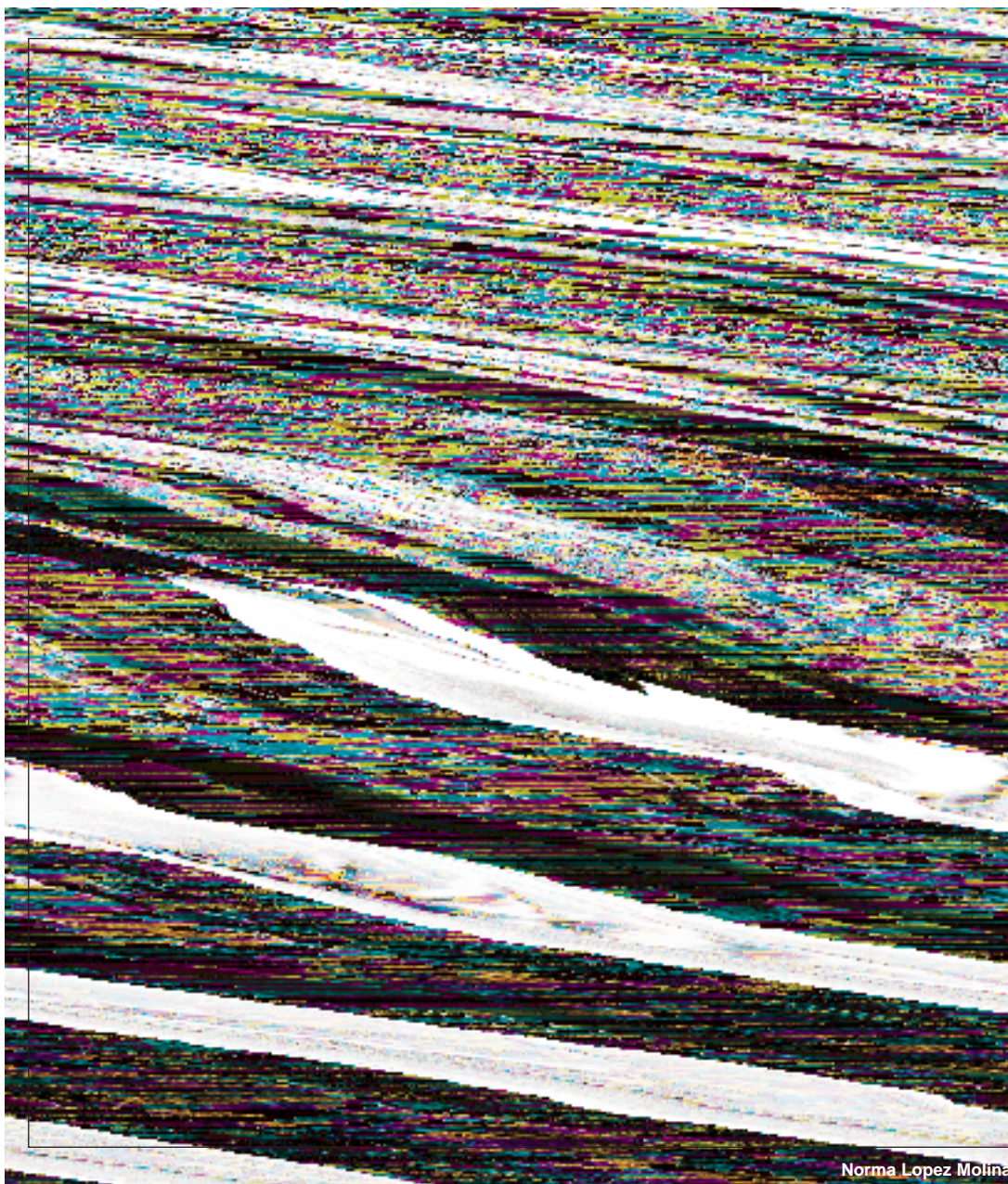
One of the most important things you can do before going to bed is to "retire your day," as Nader puts it. "Write down everything you have to do and everything that is weighing on your mind before you go to bed," she suggests. "Then leave it until morning. There is nothing you can do about it while you are in bed."

## When to turn to the pros

In reality, everyone needs slightly more than eight hours of sleep to maintain optimal levels of performance, says Dr. Alejandro D. Chediak, president-elect of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Chediak runs a sleep disorders program at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Fla.

"Humans have a great capacity to compensate for sleep loss using behaviors such as increased consumption of alertness-promoting substances like caffeine, increased carbohydrate intake and other similar measures," he says. But these coping strategies don't mean someone is getting enough rest.

Women are slightly more likely to experience sleep disturbances than men, largely due to hormonal fluctuations, say experts. Aging can also contribute to difficulty sleeping.



Norma Lopez Molina

## Sleep questionnaire

If you answer yes to two or more of the following questions, you should consider talking to a health professional about your sleep, according to Bay Sleep Clinic:

Have you been told that you snore excessively, or that your breathing is interrupted while you sleep?

Do you feel sleepy or fatigued during the day?

Do you doze off while reading, watching TV or driving?

Do your legs jerk frequently or feel uncomfortable (restless) before or during sleep?

Do you have trouble falling asleep?

Do you awake with a headache?

Do you experience memory loss?

Do you awake gasping for air?

Do you find your heart beating irregularly at night?

Do you awake in the morning without feeling refreshed?

Do you ever experience sleep paralysis?

Do you have a weight problem?

Is your work or family life affected by sleep problems?

Do you feel that you get less sleep than you need at night?

If getting enough rest is proving evasive even after trying the measures suggested here, it is probably time for a professional evaluation, says Stanford's Takaoka.

Other signs that a consultation may be helpful include heavy snoring, daily fatigue, teeth grinding or severely restless legs that interfere with falling asleep.

At places like Bay Sleep Clinic and the Stanford Sleep Disorders Center, individuals may wind up having their slumber monitored all night.

### Treating the problem

Many of those who suffer from significant sleep problems have sleep apnea, say the experts. Four out of 100 males over 40 are reported to be victims of the disorder, which is often signaled by snoring.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea is a condition in which a person repeatedly stops

breathing for short periods during the sleep cycle because of a collapse of a portion of the breathing airway. The result is that air does not reach the lungs, sleep patterns are disrupted and fatigue and chronic sleepiness result.

Sleep apnea can be caused by anatomical obstructions such as enlarged tonsils, by the natural aging process — which can cause a slackening of airways or the muscles that hold them open — or by the tongue falling back into the mouth.

One treatment for this disorder is the CPAP, or Continuous Positive Airway Pressure device. The mask-like CPAP, prescribed and fitted by a physician, helps keep the airway open and is highly effective, but does not cure the problem. If the CPAP does not work, surgery is a last option.

Sleep medications, called hypnotics, can be taken, but only when the cause of insomnia has been prop-

erly evaluated and sleep difficulties are interfering with daily life. While hypnotics will help many, if taken for long periods they can also cause morning sedation, memory problems, headaches and addiction.

These solutions may seem drastic, but there is no getting around the importance of sleep. After all, humans devote one-third of their lives to it. Plus, sleep deprivation, warns Takaoka, "can result in impairment of short-term memory and attention, mood changes such as depression, anxiety or irritability, and diminished motor skills and ability to process new information. Individuals who are excessively sleepy are at high risk for automobile accidents and work errors."

Fortunately, "most sleep disorders are readily diagnosed and treated," Takaoka says. Her bottom-line recommendation: "Have a low threshold for seeking help."

## Resources

Bay Sleep Clinic: [www.baysleep.com](http://www.baysleep.com)

Stanford Sleep Disorders Center:  
<http://www.stanfordhospital.com/clinics/medServices/clinics/sleep/sleepDisorders>

National Sleep Foundation:  
[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

American Academy of Sleep Medicines:  
[www.sleepeducation.com](http://www.sleepeducation.com)

*The Promise of Sleep: A Pioneer in Sleep Medicine Explores the Vital Connection Between Health, Happiness and a Good Night's Sleep*, by William C. Dement and Christopher Vaughn. Bantam Dell Pub Group.

*No More Snoring*, by Victor Hoffstein, M.D., Ph.D., head of the Respiratory and Sleep Division at the Nose and Sinus Clinic at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. John Wiley & Sons Inc.

*A Woman's Guide to Sleep: Guaranteed Solutions for a Good Night's Rest*, by Joyce Walsleben and Rita Baron-Faust. Random House Inc.