

Stop counting sheep (and hitting snooze)

January 19 2009, By Fauzia Arain

WAKE UP

If you're lucky, you're still sleeping when it's "time to make the doughnuts."

We asked Joni Caputa, a pastry chef of two years at BitterÂsweet Pastry Shop in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood, how she manages to kick the sandÂman to the curb at 4:15 every morning.

"I don't let myself set a snooze on my alarm, and I put my alarm across the room," Caputa said.

Once she's vertical, "I have coffee immediately from an automatic coffee maker, and I need a glass of cold water to wake up."

FALL ASLEEP

Whether you suffer from insomnia or are just having an off night, the solution is mostly mind over matter.

No gadgets, no pills, no hypnotism, just some sound advice from Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Dr. Lisa Woofe, a physician who specializes in sleep medicine.

Set your internal clock.

"Have stringent times for getting into and out of bed," Woofe said.

"Your body has a clock that helps regulate your brain when you're awake

and asleep, and your body will automatically start the sleep process accordingly."

Get steamed. "Before bed, take a hot shower and then enter a relatively cool bedroom," Woofe recommended as a way to copy the natural effects of a warming sun setting.

"Imagine an ancient man living out on a prairie.

When the sun goes up, you get up, when the sun sets, you sleep ... and when the sun goes down it gets cooler. In modern society, we regulate lights and the body gets disconnected from the environment."

Let there not be light.

"Get both bright light, like sunlight, in the morning and avoid bright lights in the evening," Woofe said.

"And for shift workers, if you're a third-shift person and you leave work at 10 a.m., put sunglasses on when you go outside."

Work it out. "During daytime, make sure you get exercise. It helps sleep at night, especially for those over the age of 60, for whom staying asleep is a big issue," said Woofe, who cited studies done at Northwestern's sleep center by her colleague Dr. Phyllis Zee. "Research has shown that exercise during the day is better than a sleeping pill." Woofe also says to complete all activity two hours before sleep time.

Put the brakes on your brain. "Keep a worry diary in your bedroom, so when you're thinking, 'I can't forget to get that fax at the office' or 'I have to remember to go to the post office,' write that in the diary and put it next to your bed," says Woofe.

Another way to distract a restless mind is to fill it with peaceful pictures.

"With imagery therapy, you come up with a pleasurable image, such as a beautiful vacation on the beach, and you concentrate on how the sun feels on your face, the sand on your toes, the cute guy bringing you drinks," she said.

Woofe warned not to sleep in to make up for the lost hours at night. "Keep a fixed wake-up time, and get up and go about your day.

It's an investment in good sleep," she said. "The next night you should be tired enough to fall asleep on time. A little bit of pain today means good sleep for tomorrow."

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