

APFRI: Sleep tied to operational performance

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March 2, 2009 – Most people know that the average person needs about eight hours of sleep per night, but did you know that sleep issues can have a direct link to operational performance?

Recent studies suggest that many Soldiers are complaining about a lack of sleep. Consequences can include reduced alertness, memory deficits and slower information processing. Lack of sleep can also have health consequences including increased irritability, greater risk for depression and anxiety and adverse effects on cardiac health.

"Recovering from chronic, restricted sleep may take several days," said Capt. Christopher Myers, Army Physical Fitness Research Institute. "Sleep restores brain metabolic activity which is the physiological basis for mental performance."

But there are steps you can take to help improve your restorative sleep.

- Bed is for sleep only (no TV/ movies, video games, reading, writing, homework)
- Maximum of 30 minutes awake in bed at any one time. If you can't fall asleep by 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing (i.e. read a book) until you begin to feel tired and try again.
- Establish a consistent bed time 7 days\week. No napping.
- Eliminate caffeine from your diet and any other stimulants.
- Eat a balanced diet and avoid big meals within two hours of bed time. A small snack that is high in carbs and/or includes tryptophan (e.g. milk) may help with sleepiness.
- Exercise regularly, but avoid exercise within two hours of bed time.
- Establish a relaxation time one hour prior to bed time.

- Reduce the temperature in your room by a few degrees at night time.
- Schedule a problem-solving time during the day to deal with things that you might think about while trying to sleep. Keep a notepad next to your bed if necessary.
- Avoid using alcohol, OTC medications or other drugs in an attempt to help you sleep.

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