FACT SHEET

SLEEP HYGIENE

WHAT IS SLEEP HYGIENE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Sleep hygiene refers to the quality and quantity of sleep and *healthy sleeping habits*. Developing these habits can help someone fall asleep and stay asleep (American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM), 2021). According to AASM (2020), studies show that adequate sleep promotes daytime alertness, helps a person maintain good health, and promotes motor function, learning, and memory. Daily behaviors/routines can influence on how well (or poorly) a person sleeps, particularly bedtime routines. Foods, drinks, medications, medical conditions, and activities can all affect sleep hygiene.

References

Healthy sleep habits. (2021, April 2). American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM). Sleep Education. https://sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits/

Importance of sleep & effects of sleep deprivation on college students. (2020, January 27). American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM). https://aasm.org/college-students-getting-enough-sleep-is-vital-to-academic-success

SIGNS OF POOR SLEEP HYGIENE

The most common signs of poor sleep hygiene include difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep, and feeling sleepy during the day. Regularly experiencing sleep that lacks quality or quantity can be a sign, as well. Prolonged insomnia, extreme daytime drowsiness, and sleep disorders (e.g., obstructive sleep apnea) might appear to improve with improved sleep hygiene, but these conditions are more serious and require consultation with a health care provider to identify the causes and discuss the best treatment approach.

Reference

Sleep hygiene. (2020, December 8). Sleep Foundation. https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene

SLEEP HYGIENE AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES/AUTISM (ID/A)

According to Horan et al. (2019), individuals with ID/A commonly experience sleep problems, which can adversely affect their health and well-being. Sleep hygiene is an important component in the care of people with ID/A; it can improve their quality of life. Good sleep hygiene and routines is a vital component "of an overall person-centered, activities of daily living approach to care" (Horan et al., 2019, p. 19); unfortunately, it is a component often overlooked in care-planning for people with ID/A.

References

Francis Horan, P., Fleming, S., Cleary, M., Burke, E., Doyle, C., Byrne, K., Griffiths, C., & Keenan, P. (2019). 'Sweet dreams': An evidence-based approach to effective sleep hygiene maintenance for people with an intellectual disability. Learning Disability Practice, 22(2), 13-19. https://journals.rcni.com/learning-disability-practice/evidence-and-practice/sweet-dreams-an-evidencebased-approach-to-effective-sleep-hygiene-maintenance-for-people-with-an-intellectual-disability-ldp.2019.e1958/abs

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE SLEEP HYGIENE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH ID/A?

The following tips, adapted from the Sleep Foundation (2020), can improve sleep hygiene.

- Help the individual establish a regular schedule with set times for going to bed and waking up, aiming for 8 hours of sleep.

- If a nap is necessary, encourage a short nap early in the afternoon.

- Assist the individual in following a consistent bedtime routine.
    - Teach the person how to take the same steps in the same order every night (e.g., put on pajamas, brush teeth, practice calming techniques).
    - Set aside 30 minutes to relax before bedtime, and utilize calming techniques that the individual chooses, such as listening to soothing music, gentle stretching, looking at a picture book, reading/being read to.
    - Avoid bright lights, including light from electronic devices and televisions, within 30-60 minutes of bedtime. (Always practice safety measures.)
    - Do not make falling asleep the goal; focus on relaxation.
    - Foster a positive connection to bedtime; if the person has not fallen asleep within 20 minutes, suggest they get up and repeat their calming techniques in dim lighting before trying to fall asleep again.

Additional tips adapted from Horan et al. (2019) that have proven beneficial for sleep hygiene:

- Keep a sleep diary to track sleep patterns by recording information such as pre-bedtime rituals, times of falling asleep and awakening, night-time awakenings, length and frequency of napping, and behaviors related to sleep.

- Initiate or increase activities/exercise during the day, well before bedtime.

- Reduce or eliminate caffeine intake, especially several hours before bedtime.

- Eat a light snack or warm beverage before bedtime; avoid large amounts of liquids. (Always follow an individual's dietary guidelines.)

- Ensure that the bedroom is not over-stimulating but conducive to sleep, with a comfortable bed, bedding, and room temperature, and curtains that block outside light.

- Be mindful of the volume and tone of your voice when a person awakes during the night, keep lights dim, minimize noise, and avoid a stimulating environment.

- Together with the individual, make a picture representation of the bedtime routine.

Consultation with an individual's primary care provider, psychiatrist, or psychologist is advisable to assess for physical and/or psychological health conditions, identify medications that impact sleep, and rule out possible pain or discomfort that may contribute to poor sleep hygiene. The sleep diary, maintained over a few weeks, can be beneficial for the health care provider to view when conducting an assessment.

References

Francis Horan, P., Fleming, S., Cleary, M., Burke, E., Doyle, C., Byrne, K., Griffiths, C., & Keenan, P. (2019). 'Sweet dreams': An evidence-based approach to effective sleep hygiene maintenance for people with an intellectual disability. Learning Disability Practice, 22(2), 13-19. https://journals.rcni.com/learning-disability-practice/evidence-and-practice/sweet-dreams-an-evidencebased-approach-to-effective-sleep-hygiene-maintenance-for-people-with-an-intellectual-disability-ldp.2019.e1958/abs

Sleep hygiene. (2020, December 8). Sleep Foundation. https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene

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