



Deana Charter, LCP

# Sleep . . . Zzzzzzz

By Deana Charter, LCP, EMDR Therapist, Infinite Healing and Wellness



**W**e need it, we want it, and we have to have enough of it to operate at an optimum level. According to the National Center on Sleep Disorders, 40 million Americans have a sleep disorder and do not get enough sleep. A sleep disorder is defined as: “a group of syndromes characterized by disturbance in the patient’s amount of sleep, quality or timing of sleep, or in the behaviors or physiological conditions associated with sleep.” Insomnia, narcolepsy, and sleep apnea are some common sleep disorders. There are actually around 70 different sleep disorders. To qualify for the diagnosis of sleep disorder, the condition must be a persistent problem, cause the patient significant emotional stress, and interfere with occupational functioning. Consider the impact sleep has on your quality of life. For most Americans, 6–8 hours of uninterrupted sleep is ideal. A lot of people operate on less sleep. Sleep problems make life harder to function. Lack of sleep can lead to physical problems such as high blood pressure and heart problems. It can also create emotional problems, such as low distress tolerance or emotional regulation issues,

like overreacting to things because we are more sensitive. These emotional problems can affect interpersonal relationships, work, and social interaction. Lack of sleep creates an internal struggle within our brains which can result in depression and anxiety, creating even more issues with sleep patterns.

We are constantly stimulated with all of the technology readily available to us today and have to find ways to turn our brains off so that we can recharge. We are constantly on our phones and most people do not leave the house without their phone chargers! We don’t give ourselves the chance to let our brains rest and recharge. There’s always something to do and work that needs to get done. We create lists of things, obligations, and commitments. We create more and more to do and so many things to think about, and these life stressors can put us at risk for a sleep disorder.

March is national sleep month and in honor of this, it’s important to know what you can do to maintain healthy sleep habits and what you can do if you are at risk.

### Good sleep habits include:

- Creating a bed time ritual that allows your brain to tell your body it's time to wind down (e.g., read 20 minutes before turning out the lights, take a bath, or light stretches.)
- Don't play on electronic equipment 20 minutes before bedtime.
- Go to bed and rise at the same time each day and night.
- Don't eat, drink, or smoke close to bedtime.
- Make the atmosphere as comfortable as you can; minimizing noise, light, and temperature.
- Wear comfortable clothing that you can move around in and isn't restricting.
- Get out of bed in the morning when your body naturally wakes up.
- Minimize taking naps during the day.

Sleep allows our bodies to recharge and restore. We need to rest so we can tackle all of the daily stress in our lives as best as possible. Sleep gives us the capacity to manage stress better.

What happens if I still can't sleep, and I have been cleared of a medical sleep problem? Could you be suffering from an underlying emotional problem?

### If so try the following suggestions:

- Take several deep breaths. Concentrating on your belly and breathing deeply helps to quiet the mind.
- Repeat the words to yourself "thought stop" over and over. If you're visual you can repeat the words "clear and release" and allow your mind to bring up a chalk board with whatever thoughts are on your mind and see them being erased away.


This will allow your mind to go from the emotional side of the brain to the logical part of the brain.

- Put a notepad by your bed and write down what is on your mind, this will allow you to stop ruminating, you won't forget what you wanted to remember because it will be on paper and it will be there in the morning.
- Turn the alarm clock away from you, don't focus on what time it is, that will just add more worry depending on what time it is.
- Don't get out of bed and use the computer or any device, this will just activate the brain and cause you to be thinking about something else.

If you find you are still not able to sleep after medically ruling out any physical health problems and after trying all of these behavior modifications, there may be an underlying problem that needs to be addressed with the help of a professional. A counselor can help address the root of the issues as your body is trying to tell you something. Get the help you need, so you can get the rest you deserve!

*Infinite Healing and Wellness LLC, at 2563 S. Val Vista Drive #108 in Gilbert, is a collaborative counseling practice designed to serve children, families, teens, adults, couples, first responders, and military veterans. For more information, call 480-448-1076, email: info@infinitehealingandwellness.com, or visit www.infinitehealingandwellness.com.*

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**Marga L. Cullumber, Instructor**  
His Best 4 Health  
**928.970.3764**  
HB4Health.com • hisbest4health@earthlink.net



## DAN DIPOMAZIO, CPA, PLLC

1820 E RAY ROAD, SUITE A113  
CHANDLER, AZ 85225

OFFICE – 480-264-5140  
CELL – 602-524-2004  
FAX – 480-264-5142  
DAN@DIPOMAZIOCPA.COM

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PERSONALIZED ACCOUNTING SERVICES, TAX PLANNING  
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