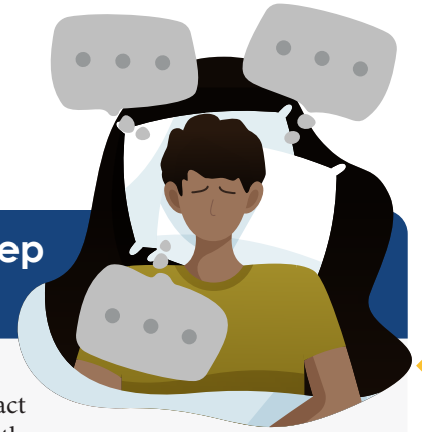# Improving Sleep

And Managing Intrusive Thoughts

Sleep

Sleep is important for our health and well-being; it gives our body time to rest and get ready for the next day. Adults usually need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Sometimes people suffer from lack of sleep. There are many things that may cause a lack of sleep, such as busy schedules, sickness, or worry/anxiety caused by intrusive thoughts. It is common to experience difficulty sleeping after the loss of a loved one or after witnessing a violent crime. Lack of sleep can result in exhaustion, irritability, and increased anxiety. Going for several days or weeks without enough sleep can also be dangerous because it impairs our physical and emotional health.

Improving Sleep

It is important to prepare yourself for sleep and to make sure your room is calm and relaxing. If there are things that have worked to improve your sleep in the past, try them again. Some things to try are:

- Begin getting ready for bed about 1 hour before your actual bedtime. Do something relaxing- like drinking warm milk, taking a warm bath, watching a funny movie, or reading a good book
- Pray or listen to prayers/spiritual music
- Meditate or practice deep breathing
- Listen to relaxing music
- Think of three good things that happened during the day as you go to bed
- Exercise, sometime during the day, at least more than 4-5 hours before bed
- Avoid caffeine intake after lunch
- Avoid watching the news late in the evening

Once you find some techniques that work for you, try to continue the same helpful routine every night, so your body becomes used to it.

Prolonged Sleep Deprivation

As is the case with stress, the body can react to sleep deprivation with increased physical symptoms such as headaches and digestive problems. Other common effects are decreased concentration, unpredictable mood swings, increased impulsiveness, and decreased energy and motivation.

Intrusive Thoughts

Thinking of things that you do not want; it could be frightening pictures in your head, thoughts of the violence happening again, or having other thoughts over and over that bother you. The thoughts can be intense, cause distress, and may interfere with many aspects of your life. Some intrusive thoughts are normal after a traumatic experience. You can learn ways to cope with upsetting thoughts so you will be able to sleep better. Some ways to manage intrusive thoughts are:

- Identify triggers, the things, places, sounds, or other things that might cause you to have the intrusive thoughts. What is going on around you when do you first notice the unwanted thoughts? Over time, you may be able to identify and remove triggers for these unwanted thoughts.
- Practice mindful awareness of your thoughts. The more you try to push the thoughts away, the more likely they are to persist. Try to simply observe your thoughts as though they are passing in front of you on a moving train. There is no need to follow or hold on to your thoughts.
- Seek support from friends and family. Talking about your unwanted thoughts helps them become less intense inside your head and is oftentimes more helpful than ignoring them.
- Keep a journal. Writing about distressing thoughts and reactions related to a traumatic event can help you sort out and make sense of your feelings in a healthy way.

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