

ANXIETY AND SLEEP DISORDERS – TIP SHEET

Anxiety Management

1. Exercise is an excellent way to reduce anxiety. Even upper body exercises or chair exercises can help reduce stress when undertaken regularly. These can also be used as needed to help quell growing worry.
2. Maintain proper sleep hygiene. Poor sleep can lead to the development or exacerbation of anxiety. Most sleep-related problems do not improve with the use of sleep medications. Having a plan on how to modify sleep non-pharmacologically is important (see accompanying sheet).
3. Avoid caffeine intake. Caffeine can promote anxiety by being a stimulating agent. Make sure the diet has little, or no, caffeine.
4. Promote the use of muscle relaxation techniques (see accompanying sheet).
5. Employ cognitive tasks to both redirect and calm the patient. Many people enjoy puzzles, word games, and trivia as a means of relaxation. Make sure the difficulty level of the task is appropriate for the cognitive level of the patient so at the task itself will not cause anxiety. Relaxation aids such as calming music may greatly reduce anxiety.
6. Patients who may benefit from the use of either audio or video will be preferred, as the headphones block out all competing auditory stimuli.
7. Repetitive tasks or activities can calm patients. Rocking chairs were invented with that in mind. Knitting, folding clothing, sweeping, and putting beads on a string can all reduce nervousness. Repetitive verbal activities also have proven to reduce anxiety. Saying the rosary or reciting prayers, chanting or simple phrase repetition may lessen worries and concerns.
8. Relaxation exercises are commonly used by anxious residents (see relaxation sheet).

Relaxation Therapy

1. Focusing Pick out a small personal object that you enjoy, like a piece of jewelry or a flower. Focus all your attention on this object as you inhale and exhale slowly and deeply for 1-2 minutes. Try not to let any other thoughts enter your mind. If they do, simply refocus on the object.
2. Meditation Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and begin a slow, relaxed breathing. Focus all attention on your breathing. When you inhale say “peace” to yourself and when you exhale say “calm.” Draw out the word so it lasts an entire breath. Continue this exercise until you feel relaxed.
3. Oak Tree Sit comfortably, arms at your sides. Close your eyes, breathe slowly. See your body as a strong oak tree. Imagine strong roots growing down into the ground to anchor you so you can handle any stress. If uncomfortable thoughts break through, again imagine yourself as the strong oak tree.

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4. **Grounding Cord** Sit in a comfortable position, arms at your sides, eyes closed, breathe deeply. Imagine a thick wide cord attached to the base of your spine. This is your grounding cord. Use an image that evokes strength, like a tree trunk or a thick cable. Imagine the cord to be wide and sturdy. Imagine a metal hook is at the end of the cord and this hook falls 200 feet into the bedrock of the earth. Continue to breathe deeply and visualize how sturdy and grounded that cord makes you feel.

5. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** Lie on your back in a comfortable position. Allow your arms to rest at your sides, palms down. Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply. Clench your hands into fists and hold tight for 15 seconds, relaxing the rest of your body. Then let your hands relax. Now tense and relax the rest of your body in this order: face, shoulders, back, stomach, pelvis legs, feet and toes. Hold for 15 seconds and relax for 30 seconds when going from area to area. Finish the exercise by imagining the remaining tension flowing out of your fingertips.

6. **Erasing Stress** Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Breathe slowly and deeply. Visualize a situation, a person, or even a belief (such as “I’m afraid to speak to others.”) that causes anxiety or fear. You may see a very specific situation in which this may happen and cause a great deal of anxiety. Imagine a large eraser, like a chalkboard eraser, floats into your hand. Take the eraser and rub it over the stressful picture until it disappears from your thoughts. When you can no longer see the stressful picture, simply continue to focus on your deep breathing for another minute, inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply.

Sleep in a Nursing Home

1. With any sleep problem recording sleep accurately is essential, Use an hourly chart, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide the practitioner information about the resident’s sleep.

2. Sleeping in a more broken up manner is not necessarily unusual for demented residents. However, making sure that they have an opportunity to sleep more routinely should be part of every treatment plan.

3. Engaging the residents in daily activities which are of interest to them individually and are compatible with their level of cognition is essential. Many residents sleep due to limited activity during the day.

4. Avoid naps during the day, or if a nap is required schedule it routinely, say for 15 minutes from 4-4:15pm.

5. Make sure that the levels of light the residents are exposed to during the daytime are as bright as possible. Sunlight exposure helps greatly. Low light levels interfere with the ability to stay awake and lead to daytime somnolence among residents.

6. As much as possible, limit nighttime interruptions for the resident. Although these often cannot be avoided, they could be timed in concert with caregiving for the roommate as well.

7. Sleeping pills should never be used as a first line treatment for poor nighttime sleep. They are useful only for brief periods and they can lead to daytime fatigue, confusion and falls. Again, a person sleeping 7-8 hours a day in a piece-meal manner should not be given

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a sleeping pill at nighttime.

8. Daytime somnolence, especially when combined with nighttime sleep and obesity could be obstructive sleep apnea. Older people are more at risk for this disorder. Overnight pulse oxygenation may help determine if sleep apnea is a possibility.

9. Be aware many medications may cause sleepiness or insomnia. Some may interfere with sleep in a secondary manner, such as taking a diuretic too late in the day, so the resident has to urinate a lot at night.

10. Some residents have a completely reversed sleep-wake cycle. In many cases, it makes more sense to feed them and provide activities for the night shift to involve them with. Trying to reverse such a cycle can often make things worse.

11. Do not force a resident to return to bed. This usually only increases distress. If the resident is disruptive try to exercise them with walking hallways or engage in a repetitive task, such as folding towels or sorting buttons. Some residents simply want to be near caregivers or have a snack. Wait until the resident is clearly sleepy before returning them to bed.

12. Make sure that the bed is comfortable for the resident. Some residents may have slept for years on a chair or couch for years prior to admission. Others may not like the new bed at the facility. Make sure the resident's room is not too warm or too cold for them. Some roommates may set the temperature too cold or too warm for the resident. Adding blankets or taking them away may be in order.

Sleep Hygiene

Personal Habits

- Fix a set bedtime and awakening time.
- Avoid napping during the day.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Exercise regularly, but not right before bed.
- Make sure the resident receives an adequate amount of light exposure during the day.

Sleeping Environment

- Use comfortable bedding for the resident
- Find a comfortable temperature setting for sleeping and keep the room well-ventilated.
- Block out all distracting noise.
- Let residents sleep in a chair if they can.
- Lower hallway lights and TVs to establish a nighttime routine.
- Minimize disruptiveness during nighttime care by using a flashlight or low light, speaking softly, etc.
- Avoid "routine" vitals during sleep.

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Getting Ready for Bed

- Try a light snack before bed.
- Practice relaxation techniques before bed.
- Talk to resident if they look distressed.
- Know their pre-sleep ritual.
- Get them into their favorite sleeping position.
- Getting up in the middle of the night
- If up more than 15 minutes in the middle of the night get them up out of bed.
- Leave the bedroom.
- Read, have a light snack or engage in quiet activity or take a bath.
- Remain up until they are so tired they cannot keep their eyes open.
- People report this process usually takes 20-30 minutes.

Television

- Television usually keeps people awake.
- Listening to the radio may be helpful for falling asleep.