

In Like a Lion

As the saying goes, March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb, referring to the harsh weather at the beginning of the month and the (usually) more gentle weather at the end.



Don't forget to change your clocks! It's "spring ahead," so you lose an hour.

Getting a good night's rest does wonders for the body and the mind. Without it, it is very difficult to keep up with our daily obligations, or even to stand up straight. The body needs adequate sleep in order to function to its strongest and healthiest potential. For these reasons, having good sleep hygiene is essential.

Sleep hygiene refers to the way in which a person uses environmental conditions and personal structures the environment and habits to fall asleep and maintain sleep (timing of exercise, use of caffeine, etc.) outside of medical treatment.

Creating a sleep-friendly environment is the great way to ensure better sleep hygiene. Several factors that make up a sleep environment are often underestimated in terms of how helpful or harmful they can be to individual's sleep cycle.

Sleep Tips

It is important to learn how to create the best sleep environment to regulate quality sleep. The [National Sleep Foundation](#) suggests a number of things to help sleep well.

Light

Using electronic devices (especially TVs, cell phones, and computers) makes it difficult for the brain to wind down and fall asleep. It is best to keep electronics out of the bedroom and not to use them for a half-hour to an hour before bedtime. Another reason to turn off all electronic devices is that a sleep-friendly environment should not contain things that are loud or over-stimulating.

Light is one of the most commanding regulators of the biological clock, as it influences an individual's alertness and sleepiness throughout the day. Exposure to bright lights during nighttime stimulates the brain to stay awake, while less light makes it easier to fall asleep. Curtains, blinds, and eye masks can also block out morning light, and can prevent one from waking up too early.

continued



Sleep tips, continued

Temperature

Temperature can impact sleep. There is no ideal temperature for sleep, but temperatures that are generally conducive for sleep are between 54 and 75 degrees. Many people find that a slightly cool temperature is best for sleeping. Hot sleeping environments make it more likely that a person will experience lighter sleep cycles and several awakenings during the night. Sheets, blankets, and what you wear can affect your body temperature.

Sound

Many people use sound sources to fall asleep. Sound generators that create soothing sounds of waterfalls or breezes can make it easier to relax and fall asleep. Soothing music can do the trick as well. Even so, quiet sleep environments are ideal for most people. Consider wearing ear plugs or headphones if there are noises that get in the way of falling asleep that cannot be taken care of (like a partner snoring).

A good night's sleep provides a strong foundation for health and wellness. You're already losing an hour in March, so do everything you can to get the best sleep possible for the rest of the month!

Examine Your Daily Rhythm

Insomnia is a problem that we all deal with from time to time, especially those of us with bipolar disorder. Insomnia means hard to get to sleep, you wake in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep, or you wake up too early in the morning, unable to get the rest that you need. [Interpersonal Social Rhythm Therapy](#) was developed by Dr. Ellen Frank and her associates at the University of Pittsburgh to help people with bipolar disorder learn what is causing insomnia, and what steps to take to treat it. The idea is that stable daily rhythms lead to more stability of mood.

Our bodies all have an internal clock (our circadian rhythm) that tells us when it's time to get up and time to go to sleep. Most of the time, this clock is adjusted to daylight but, when it is interrupted, sleep patterns are no longer regular. As a result, mood, focus, and ability to perform daily tasks suffer.

Sleep deprivation can cause episodes of mania or depression in someone who diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Disruptions to daily routines and sleep patterns come in many different forms. A few of the causes that can disrupt sleep are staying out late with friends on the weekends, or weekdays, eating at irregular times, or not having structure to your day. However, more than just physical things can interrupt daily routines. A stressful event easily causes a person to lose sleep.

Interpersonal Social Rhythm Therapy helps people regulate their daily routines, which can increase the length of time between manic or depressive episodes.

Through Interpersonal Social Rhythm Therapy, you can learn to deal with disruptions, and work through stressors that can put your circadian rhythm off track. During the first month or so of therapy, you keep a journal and answer questions, which provide a baseline of your daily routine (or show the lack of routine) and how your daily routine affects your mood. For example, what happens if you skip a meal or stay out too late?

Once you know your baseline, you set a series of goals to get your routine more structured and consistent. This is a slow process, not an overnight fix, designed to ease into permanent and lasting lifestyle changes. Steps might include fewer hours at work, a new bedtime routine around bedtime, or going to bed a little earlier each week. It's important to set a routine that works for you. The times are not necessarily important. Instead, it's about getting the best amount of sleep for you.

Giving up Soda by *George Brice, Jr.*

About 9 years ago, I attended a health fair and learned about the health issues I and fellow peers face. I decided to address the negative effects of too much soda. At that time, I drank soda all day—in the morning, afternoon, evening, nighttime, and often after midnight. Over those years, I drank soda along with comfort foods of pork, steak, chicken, hamburger, beef and assorted chips, candy bars, ice cream, and cake. It seemed that nothing was too sweet for me. I didn't eat enough healthy vegetables and fruits or exercise regularly. Drinking soda and eating poorly went hand in hand with watching TV and attending sporting events where I drank more soda and ate lots of red meat and fried foods.

I finally recognized that soda, and its liquid calories, were connected to craving other sugary drinks, unhealthy eating habits, and my low motivation to regularly exercise and lose weight.

After the April 2011 Health Fair ended, I decided to immediately stop drinking soda. I wanted my experience at the Health Fair to be memorable and meaningful. I thought that giving up soda may lead to other beneficial health habits.

I have some personal characteristics that helped me be successful, like being willing to apply new knowledge, challenge myself, not to do things because other people are doing them, and make informed decisions. I sought support to maintain this goal from a peer supporter.

What I found most difficult was being around friends, family, and relatives who drank and enjoyed soda. However, I had a history of drinking water before my excessive soda use. Over time I really recognized and felt the health benefits of not drinking soda, which helped me embrace and endure the initial discomfort of being around people drinking soda.

Some of the strategies and skills that were most helpful to me included:

- ✓ Having a daily peer supporter championing me to not drink soda
- ✓ Check-ins through email and phone about the soda cravings I experienced
- ✓ Checking in with a peer supporter regarding challenges and daily successes
- ✓ Over time, helping family limit soda purchases

My success has motivated me to working on other health and wellness goals. I have lost weight and have started and maintained other types of healthy routine and habits. I am proud of 9 years of my wonderful soda-free routines and habits!

The Bonsai Tree by *Joe Meany*

Working in the arena of wellness and recovery is important for me. Not only as a service provider, but as someone who searches for a balance in my own life. For too long, I have allowed my stubborn personality to hinder the humility one needs to accept and improve one's self...until my new and strong interest in the art of Bonsai. Bonsai is a Japanese art in which, using a variety of tools and training methods, any tree can be turned into a beautiful, healthy, work of art.

Wiring is used to shape the branches of the tree over time. Shears are used to trim the tree and keep it fit and promote new growth. Cutters and repotting keep the roots healthy and provide new soil for the roots to grow in. It takes a significant amount of time to go from seed or wild sapling into a trained Bonsai. *continued*



The Bonsai Tree, continued

The image of the Bonsai tree to me is one of health, discipline, and growth. Most importantly, it shows me that, to shape something so beautiful, external tools are required to begin, maintain, and further the transformation. The shape and style of the bonsai is up to the one applying the tools.

The concept of Wellness provides the framework for finding the tools that any person needs in life to grow into the person s/he wants to be. Utilizing the 8 dimensions of Wellness and using Wellness tools, such as a Wellness Recovery Action Plan, anyone can transform into a healthier and more unique individual. Like the Bonsai tree, this does not come naturally. It requires work and support.

For those of us who are aware of Wellness, I urge you to further your own Wellness, as I am. For those who are not familiar with Wellness, speak to your supports and research Wellness so you can learn about it as well. All of us, with time and effort, can begin or continue on a path of personal growth and endless positive transformation.

Ageing Well by Peggy Swarbrick

As I celebrate becoming another year older, I continue to notice how I am aging. Some pain has become more chronic and sometimes gets in the way of what I do and how I feel. My energy lowers much sooner each day and I realize I can't keep the pace I could when I was younger, I continue to reflect on my training as an occupational therapist and the many people who seemed to age gracefully, thinking about what they did.

My father died in his mid-eighties but, despite some medical challenges, he remained engaged in activities that I believe contributed to his longevity.

He pursued many valued social roles (community member, worker, member of a softball team, singer, and member of a university glee club, to name a few). His activities fueled his passions and kept him socially, mentally, and physically engaged. Working was the key valued activity he pursued until he died. He was very passionate and involved in work and his refusal to retire clearly illustrated how work provided him purpose and meaning. Until just a few weeks before he died, he read the entire newspaper every day—an activity he did all his life. It was clearly a valued activity that kept his mind sharp and kept him engaged in local and world events. He remained active playing sports until he had to stop, and he enjoyed many trips to NY City to sing at concerts with a glee club.

My mother told me that what kept her in the spin of things was doing activities with her children and grandchildren. She enjoyed talking on the phone (landline), which kept her socially and emotionally connected. She especially enjoyed being involved with her young granddaughters' hobbies. She took trips with them to the local library and joined them at their school activities. Spending time with them kept her young at heart.

As I age, I will continue to remind myself of the importance of keeping engaged in valued activities that use my strengths and keep me socially and emotionally connected. I see many people around me start to isolate as well as grieve the things they can no longer do. The more we remain involved in daily activities associated with valued social roles, we may benefit in both quality and length of life. Reading, hobbies, family, friendships, and spiritual connections enhance wellness and counterbalance the negative impacts of advancing age. As the saying goes, it's not just the years in your life, it's the life in your years.

References and Resources

Thanks to all of our guest authors for their contributions this month. Joe Meany's piece is from *WoW*, October 2012 (Vol. 6, No. 4). Illustrations are listed online as free for reuse without attribution, from pixabay.com

