Common Sleep Issues after Concussions

Weill Cornell Medicine
SPORTS NEUROLOGY & CONCUSSION

Overview

After a concussion, sleep disturbances are common and can impact recovery.

Common Sleep Issues After a Concussion:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Frequent awakenings during the night
- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Increased fatigue but inability to sleep
- Worsening symptoms due to poor sleep

Optimizing Sleep for Concussion Recovery:

Maintain a Consistent Sleep Schedule

Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends.

Create a Relaxing Bedtime Routine

Engage in calming activities before bed, such as reading or deep breathing exercises.

Limit Screen Time

Avoid phones, tablets, and TV screens at least one hour before bedtime to reduce blue light exposure.

Optimize Sleep Environment

Keep the bedroom cool, dark, and quiet.

Avoid Stimulants and Heavy Meals Before Bed

Reduce caffeine intake in the afternoon and evening, and avoid large meals close to bedtime.

Engage in Light Physical Activity

Gentle exercises, such as stretching or walking, can promote better sleep but should be done earlier in the day.

Limit Naps

While rest is important, prolonged or late-afternoon naps can interfere with nighttime sleep.

Manage Stress and Anxiety

Practice relaxation techniques like meditation to ease the mind before sleep.

Use the Bed Only for Sleep

Avoid working, watching TV, or using electronic devis in bed to reinforce the association between bed and sleep.

Can't Sleep? Get Up and Try Again Later

If unable to sleep after 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity such as folding laundry until you feel tired.

Therapy for Insomnia:

Melatonin

Your body naturally produces this about two hours before sleep. If you are having difficulty falling asleep, you can try melatonin 1-3mg two hours before bedtime.

Relaxation and Mindfulness

Try deep breathing or meditation.
Apps: Headspace, Calm, Insight Timer

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)

- Helps you identify and change thoughts and behaviors that cause or worsen sleep problems
- Best with a medical provider, but can use applications, such as *CBT-I Coach* or *Insomnia Coach*

Other Factors that Can Impact Sleep after Concussion

Good sleep habits aid recovery, but other health and lifestyle factors can affect sleep. Consider these if problems persist:

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA):

In OSA, blocked airways during sleep cause breathing pauses, snoring, and daytime sleepiness.

Pain and Discomfort:

Physical discomfort (headaches, neck pain) can interfere with sleep.

Medication Side Effects

Some medications used to manage concussion symptoms can alter sleep.

Mental Health Issues:

Anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues can affect sleep. If you're struggling emotionally after a concussion, seek support from a mental health professional.