

SLEEP MEASURES

Near the end of pregnancy, women may experience difficulty sleeping. This stems from several causes: general discomfort, irritable contractions, baby moving a lot, having to urinate every hour, a brain that just won't go to sleep or possibly normal physiologic changes preparing you for early parenthood and feedings. It is important to get as much rest as you can so that you are prepared for the work of active labor refreshed and energized. Following are some tricks for getting a good night's sleep. Try any one, all, or any combination.

PROMOTE RELAXATION

1. Are other problems or concerns keeping you awake? Examples are: other children waking up at night, not enough money, marital problems or family stress, fear of labor, etc. If this is the case, try to eliminate or reduce the problem by talking it over with your midwife, partner and/or those concerned.
2. Avoid stimulating activity before going to bed. This includes vigorous exercise, exciting television shows or books, paying your bills, housework, etc. Do something quiet and soothing, like sitting with the family, listening to soft music, and doing some of the other suggestions listed below.
3. Keep some very heavy reading material at your bedside. Try philosophy, religion, science, a dull novel, and how-to books. You'll either fall asleep reading it, or you'll be improving your mind!
4. Take a hot bath, preferably with enough water to cover your tummy. Make it luxurious-use oils, scents, salts, candles, etc.
5. Have a massage, if you can talk someone into giving you one. The head, neck, shoulders, back, and feet are particularly good areas to massage for relaxation.
6. Try progressive relaxation techniques.
7. An abundance of pillows used between your legs, against your back and under your tummy can be helpful for comfort. If you have a small bed, sleeping alone a few nights may be all you need.

SOOTHING DRINKS

1. Hot drinks. Try hot milk or herb teas. Avoid coffee or other caffeine drinks. Remember hot chocolate has caffeine in it. In fact, even caffeine drunk earlier in the day can contribute to wakefulness at night. The baby is affected by caffeine for 48 hrs after you drink it.
2. Herb teas. Chamomile, skullcap, hops, passion flower and valerian are especially relaxing. Try a blend like Nighty-Night or Sleepytime.
3. While some people find an alcoholic drink to be very relaxing, it must be stressed that alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy. If you decide to take a drink for relaxation, be careful not to make it a regular habit.

EXERCISE

If lack of sleep is getting to be a chronic problem, you may need to burn off some nervous energy or wear your body out. Don't overdo it or become exhausted. A vigorous walk or swim for 20-30 minutes a day can be helpful. Exercise also caused the body to release a substance called endorphins which have a soothing relaxing effect. Don't exercise within two hours of bedtime, however, or it may have a stimulating effect and prevent sleep.

Sleeping Pills

1. L-Tryptophan is one of the amino acids. It is a natural substance that is found in all proteins, and causes drowsiness if taken in large doses. Turkey is high in tryptophan, which is why people get sleepy after Thanksgiving dinner. L-Tryptophan can be purchased in some drug stores or health food stores. It comes in 500 mg tablets. Take one or two tablets at bedtime. It really does help you get to sleep, and it doesn't cause a hangover in the morning like sleeping pills do.
2. Over the counter or prescription sleeping pills may be effective in inducing sleep but the risks to the baby are usually not worth the sleep. All over the counter drug use should be discussed with your midwife before using them.

ACCEPTANCE

Try to avoid anxiety about not sleeping as much as you are able, since this will only serve to further inhibit your ability to relax and fall asleep. If, after trying the above measures to induce sleep, you still feel you are not getting enough rest, adjust your schedule around your body rhythms, grab naps during the day and realize that you are probably perfectly normal.