FACULTY OF REHABILITATION MEDICINE
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Department of Occupational Therapy

ASSESSING AND ADJUSTING A DORM ROOM TO IMPROVE SLEEP

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Assessing and Adjusting a Dorm Room to Improve Sleep

The accompanying video is a resource designed to increase student knowledge from an occupational therapy perspective on how to enhance one's sleep. The focus of this presentation is on how to easily assess a school dorm room and simple suggestions of how to adapt one's environment to promote sleep in a cost effective manner. The PEO model was used as guide to emphasize the impact that altering one's environment can have on the occupation of sleep.

In order to effectively evaluate one's sleeping environment, it is important to be aware of what environmental factors can contribute or interfere with a good night's sleep. If "the ideal sleep environment is *quiet, dark, cool, comfortable, clean* and *safe",* then school dorm rooms are often far from ideal and not very conducive to sleep (Solet, 2014, p. 721). School dorm rooms are often loud, bright, stuffy, messy, and can be quite uncomfortable. Additionally, a student has to manage his or her sleeping habits with a roommate who may potentially have different sleep patterns and preferences. According to a study conducted by Sexton-Radek and Hartley on a college campus in United States, the most frequent contributing factors identified as disruptive to sleep were noise from radiators, creaking floorboards, sounds caused by dripping water, the light on or sunlight in room, noise in the hallway at bedtime or earlier than regular wake up time, cell phone calls or text alerts, room mates' habits while in bed and bedroom temperatures that lead to waking up uncomfortably warm or cold at night (2013). With all of that noise, light and extreme temperatures, how is a student supposed to get a good night's sleep?

This video concentrates on evaluating and modifying three main environmental factors that can help or hinder sleep: noise, light and temperature. These factors can be easily and objectively investigated by using apps to measure the decibels, lux and degrees, respectively. There are more formalized assessments tools, such as a decibel meter, luxmeter and thermometer, but for the purpose of keeping things quick and affordable for college students a couple of Smartphone apps will do the job. A number of fast and easy strategies are suggested to adjust these three environmental factors if they are found to be less than conducive to a good night's sleep. If the issue is sound over 30Db, some quick fixes are installing a white noise machine (a fan will do as an alternative), wearing earplugs or noise cancelling headphones. If there are more than 30lux of light in the room, some simple solutions include shutting off electronics, using an eye mask or installing blackout curtains. If the problem is temperature significantly above or below 20°C, opening a window, getting an electric fan or wearing extra layers can do the trick.

In summary, the characteristics of our environment can make a big impact on how well we sleep, so if you're not getting quality sleep in your dorm, look critically at your surroundings and see if you can make some simple changes. It could save you 40 winks!

References

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