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# MOSAIC MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

THE OFFICIAL EAP NEWSLETTER OF MOSAIC COUNSELING

## HOW A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP IMPROVES YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

**Taking care of sleep problems could be the key to making moods more stable. Here's why.**

By: Carey Rossi - <https://tinyurl.com/2d2z4wnw>

After a night of tossing and turning, waking up in a crappy mood is pretty much the norm. And, if you're predisposed to anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia, or other mental health conditions, bad sleep could make your symptoms worse.

The reason isn't completely understood. "There are very strong associations between aspects of sleep physiology and mood, but the causal pathways are poorly understood," says Guy Goodwin, emeritus professor of psychiatry at Oxford University.

So, we know these two things are definitely connected, we just don't know if sleep affects moods, or if moods affect sleep. Let's explore this.

### Circadian Rhythm, Sleep, And Mood

Our bodies, finely tuned machines that they are, have different control centers to regulate what we do and when we do it. These control centers are mostly governed by the environment and our genes. Probably the most well-known of these biological rhythms is the circadian rhythm. It controls most of our biological and behavioral functions.

Now, consider that each organ in the body has its own clock which needs to be synchronized through a master clock in the brain. Pretty cool imagery, right? The theory is that the circadian rhythm helps manage this process. So when it is dysregulated, the body doesn't get the opportunity to get in sync. As a result, motor, emotional, and interpersonal functioning is altered. What's more: Sleep allows for this alignment to happen. It's almost like the body's chance to wind all the organ's clocks to keep them running along the same time. And, it explains why you feel edgy or emotional when you're overtired.



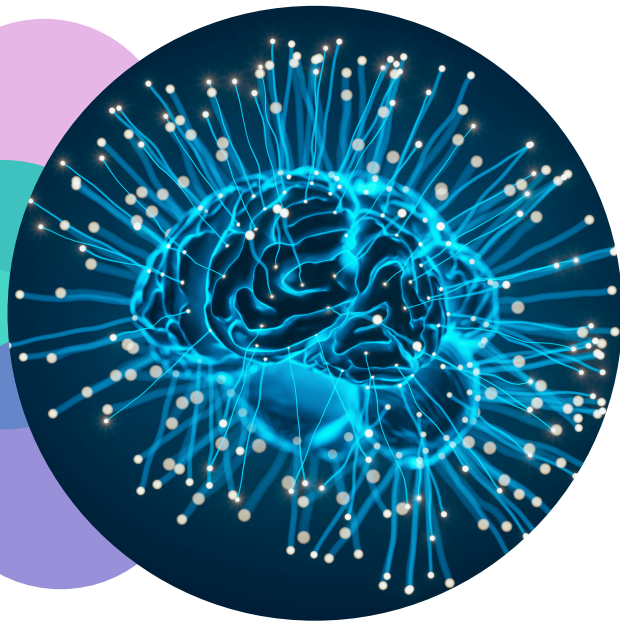
When the circadian rhythm is disturbed, sleep disorders and major physiological disturbances can happen. Sleep problems can mean cognitive impairments, such as a decrease in learning and attention capabilities, long-term memory, language development and emotions. These can take the form of insomnia, various waking times, and longer sleep times—all of which tend to be linked with psychiatric disorders.

It's hard not to recognize that there is an association between mood and rest, considering that people living with psychiatric disorders tend to complain of sleep disturbances. For instance, 50% to 80% of people living with autism tend to suffer from insomnia. What's more, science has found genetic correlations with sleep disorders and schizophrenia, as well as altered patterns of the clock genes in people living with major depressive and bipolar disorders. It's clock genes that impact cognition, mood, and reward-related behaviors.

There is some evidence that treating sleep problems can help lessen psychiatric episodes, but how?

## How Good Sleep Helps The Brain

The brain holds the master clock. But that isn't the only thing it does. All day long it processes stimuli—events, sensations, emotions, to name a few. And it takes all of that information and communicates with the rest of the body so it can react. Your brain transfers this information chemically through a series of brain cell sites called synapses. These connections get overloaded after a while. Think about if you've ever felt mentally drained. Most likely it's because your brain cells and their synapses were firing fast and furious.



"Although there is still uncertainty about the function of sleep, it seems likely to involve restoration of the function of synapses," Professor Goodwin says. So besides helping to synchronize all the clocks in the body, sleep appears to be a state in which memories can be consolidated and stored, and instinctual behaviors can be rehearsed. Part of what we encode is emotion—anxiety, distress, reward.

"We all have the experience of sleep resting our mood after a difficult day. In positive mental health, we assume this mechanism is working well to provide resilience, even after bad days," he says.



## Making A Good Night's Sleep A Reality

For sleep to be productive—resetting clocks and synapses and processing information, it needs to be set up to succeed. You tend to be tuned into the dark-and-light cycle of our days. The circadian rhythm is also tuned into this 24-hour cycle. But, for many who live with mental health issues, they are not. They tend to be night owls, or they sleep for long periods of time, or they have various types of insomnia. Basically, their rhythm is off.

Studies in bipolar patients have shown that helping them achieve more quantity, quality and timing of sleep, help decrease psychiatric episodes. Social rhythm therapy supports the implementation of regular, daily routines that can help recover the biological circadian rhythm process—and as it so happens, sleep is an important part of this. This type of therapy has also been successful in treating anxiety, OCD, bipolar disorder, and other mental health issues.

Behaviors such as retiring and waking at the same time each night or doing a relaxing activity, such as reading, before bed are all possible ways to help get into a groove and reset the daily (as well as the circadian) rhythm. All of which might help lessen those sleepless nights and those grumpy, anxious days.

A good night's rest is just one of the many factors that can contribute to overall mental wellness. If you want to start identifying opportunities for change in your life, reach out to us at Mosaic Counseling to begin accessing your Employee Assistance Program. You will be matched with a licensed therapist who can help you to identify what changes can be made to help become a better version of you. 