Do you recognize any of these sleep patterns?

• Joe lies in bed feeling exhausted but can’t fall asleep.
• Lynn’s eyes pop open in the middle of the night; she struggles to get back to sleep.
• Tim slept through the night but still wakes up feeling sluggish.

While getting enough sleep is important, so too is the quality of sleep. If you haven’t had a “good night’s rest” you may have trouble operating at your peak during the day. Consider using some of the following guidelines for improving sleep habits. You may find yourself waking up rested and refreshed!

During the Day

• Avoid stimulants — especially caffeine — after mid-afternoon (i.e. 3 p.m.) watch out for coffee, tea, cola and certain medications (check the label or ask your pharmacist).
• Get regular exercise. A good aerobic workout helps your body relax. But don’t overdo it! Exercising too close to bedtime may actually disturb your sleep.
• Avoid daytime naps or sleeping-in late for catching up on lost sleep.
• Use your bed for sleeping — not studying, eating or watching T.V. This will help train your body to associate your bed with being asleep vs. being awake.

In the Evening

• Allow yourself some time to relax after a stressful or active day. Try reading a book for fun, watching T.V., calling a friend.
• Eat lightly. Heavy meals or snacks (i.e. fatty, rich or spicy foods) can upset your stomach.
• Cut down on liquids after dinner. You will be less likely to wake up during the night to use the bathroom.
• Moderate your drinking. Alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but it interferes with how well and how long you sleep.

At bedtime

• Try to set a regular bedtime, but only lie down when you feel sleepy and not before.
• Establish a bedtime routine to cue your body that it’s time to sleep. Take a shower, close the shades, set the alarm.
• Relax your mind and body. You need to let go of the day’s events and any troubling thoughts that might interfere with sleep. Try a relaxation technique or a stretching routine (i.e. yoga).
• If you can’t fall asleep after 15 minutes, just don’t toss and turn. Get up and do something different until you feel sleepy again.

If sleep problems persist over a period of time, sleep medications alone are not the answer and you may need to see a health professional including counseling services.