

**By Ken Czuprynski, MPT, MTC**

*Over the past few months MAC4Wellness has been encouraging you, through instruction and inspiration, to eat better and exercise more. Hopefully you have been adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet as well as performing some regular walking or other form of cardiovascular exercise. These components to a healthier lifestyle are important to a vital and energetic life, but what if you are doing these things and still not feeling the benefits you would expect? What might be missing?*

*The answer might be that you are not getting adequate sleep. As we are all too well aware, life keeps coming at us in a faster and more demanding way; and one of the ways we meet our increasing life demands is by cutting back on our sleep. You have probably all heard from the media that we are a sleep-deprived country, doing more with less downtime for sleep and other forms of restorative activity.*

*Not getting adequate and proper sleep, however, comes with a cost to our health and well-being that we are only now beginning to understand. Researchers are discovering that there is a strong link between our nation's obesity epidemic and a corresponding decrease in the average number of hours that Americans sleep. They are starting to understand that inadequate sleep disturbs the body's hormones that regulate appetite.*

*People who don't get enough sleep are more likely to have bigger appetites and overeat. And we also know that when we are tired we are more likely to make poor food choices such as large caffeinated sodas; in fact, you can now buy soft drinks with extra caffeine for more of the necessary "kick" to keep us going. These drinks are replete with empty calories and further add to our weight control problems. Caffeinated drinks also disturb our sleeping patterns, creating a vicious cycle of poor sleep and tiredness followed by more caffeine with subsequent difficulty falling asleep and then more caffeine to get us going again.*

*Another important link to understand is the one between sleep and exercise. Research shows that while exercise is certainly good for one's body and health, properly timed exercise is necessary to maximize the beneficial effects. I'm certain that at one time or another you have experienced the increase in alertness and energy following a good workout or period of vigorous physical activity; well, this improvement in our alertness is certainly not conducive to falling asleep. It is, therefore, recommended that you should exercise at least three hours before bed, and the best time is usually late in the afternoon. Body temperature tends to rise during exercise and may take up to six hours to begin to drop. Cooler body temperatures are associated with sleep, and it is important to give you body time to cool off before sleep.*

*So how much sleep do we need? The answer varies across ages and is also impacted by lifestyle and health issues; however, the consensus is that most adults require between 7 and 8 hours of sleep. Here are some tips to help improve your ability to sleep:*

*1. Begin rituals that help you relax each night before bed. This can include such things as a warm bath, light snack or a few minutes of reading.*

- 2. Get up at the same time every morning. Do this even on weekends and holidays.*
- 3. Get a full night's sleep on a regular basis. Get enough sleep so you feel well-rested nearly every day.*
- 4. Avoid taking naps if you can. If you must take a nap then keep it short and before 3:00 p.m.*
- 5. Keep a regular schedule. Regular times for meals, medications and exercise help keep your inner clock running smoothly.*
- 6. Don't read, write, eat, watch TV or talk on the phone in bed.*
- 7. Avoid caffeine after lunch.*
- 8. Avoid exercise within six hours of going to bed. Give your body adequate time to cool down after vigorous activity and exercise.*
- 9. Try to get rid of or deal with things that make you worry. Make a list or write things down to help unload and ease your mind.*
- 10. Make your bedroom a quiet, dark and cool place.*

*Your sleep is affected by many factors, and you should speak with your physician if you are having chronic sleep difficulties; there are many sleep disorders including sleep apnea that only your doctor can diagnosis.*