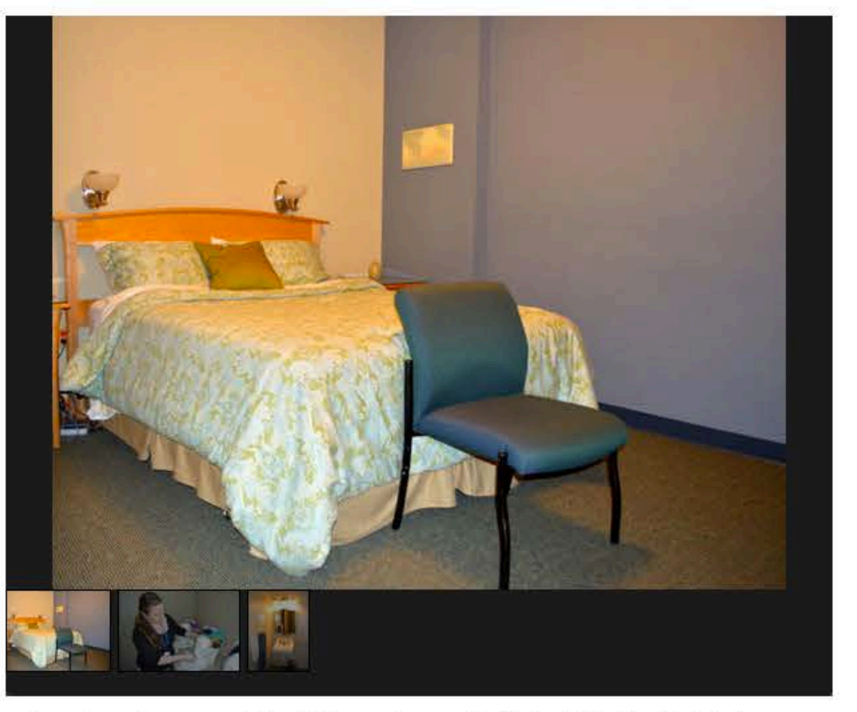


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Getting some shuteye in a sleep clinic: Sleeping in Portland



Insomniacs and snorers spend the night in separate rooms at the Portland Clinic Sleep Center to be monitored by sleep experts.

Janet Eastman | jeastman@oregonian.com

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By Janet Eastman | jeastman@oregonian.com
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on April 19, 2014 at 8:55 AM

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This column will be short and sweet because I'm having trouble staying awake. For a person who can snooze through security alarms, cellphone rings and snoring strangers on trains, I am in the dark on the concept of light sleeping.

On my quest to visit different habitats in various Portland neighborhoods, however, I am now at the **Portland Clinic Sleep Center**, listening to soft-spoken experts remind me about the importance of getting a good night's zzzzzs.

One clinic worker is so emphatic about the mind and body's need for slumber that she will ask teachers to delay giving her children a test if the little sleepyheads have not just benefited from eight full hours in dreamland.

SLEEPING IN PORTLAND

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Ah, sleep. It's an elixir that fixes so many woes. It lowers blood pressure and lifts energy. It catapults concentration and overall health and happiness. Simply, it resets us, restores us and can repair rocky relationships.

Baggy-eyed wives bring reluctant, snoring husbands to this center in southwest Portland to spend the night under the watch of sleep specialists.

The patients, nocturnal noisemakers or mattress jitter buggers, settle into a queen-size bed in a hotel room-like setting. Surrounded by soothing blue walls, they have painless sensors strapped to their forehead, cheeks, chin and legs.

As they toss and turn and make snorting sounds, biofeedback pads record their brainwaves and breathing. A log keeps track of body movements that jolt them awake. "Lots of people flop around like fish out of water," explains one clinic worker.

After the evaluation and the sleep issue is treated, the husbands return weeks later to the clinic, complaining that their wife's wheezing and grunts are keeping them awake. Now it's her turn to be studied.

No age group is immune to insomnia and the stereotype of the burly lumberjack sawing logs is easily put to rest. One clinic worker said the most disruptive snorer she has treated was a 100-pound woman.

Dr. Suvarna Palla, a neurologist who heads the clinic, treats people who can't seem to fall or stay asleep. They may have sleep apnea, where their breathing stops, or restless leg syndrome. They may suffer from narcolepsy or walk, talk or act out dreams in their sleep.

Typically, the patients who tromp down these halls have high blood pressure, obesity, depression, Type 2 diabetes and other serious ills. Poor sleep makes just about every existing medical condition worse, says Palla. Waking times are painful.

All her patients are searching for peaceful nights while their doctors are working to figure out a treatment. At the sleep clinic, their dreams may come true.

Palla says her patients "are relieved to have their sleep problem diagnosed as a medical issue."

Sometimes cranky from nightmares or years of being elbowed by a bedmate, patients are ushered into one of six separate bedrooms. They are greeted by dim lights, homey decor – a soft paisley comforter and pillows – and nightstands that hide non-beeping monitors. You can bring your own pillow. But there are no clocks. No noisy neighbors. Instead, there is a clinic-created sense of calm.

These rooms are not like your typical Hilton in other ways, too: A blue chair at the end of the bed facing a TV is for you to sit while your body is wired with monitors. Another difference: These rooms have a camera that watches your every flip, flop and flutter. With a night-vision camera, a high-tech sandman can spot if you sleep with your eyelids partially open. "Eyes glow in the dark," I'm told.

Another way it differs: Although the building is a Mack truck's distance from Interstate 5 off Carman Drive, it's quiet here. Not only are walls and windows super insulated, but the staff keeps voices low. When I ask if patients can sleep nude, one employee tells me, very politely and in a professional hush, that "it's more comfortable for everyone if patients wear PJs."

If stress is the problem, patients get counseling and learn about relaxation techniques and biofeedback.

Instead of sleeping pills, they are advised to take a warm bath before bed, sip a cup of warm milk or chamomile tea, and avoid napping, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime. They are to exercise, but at least four hours before they hit the pillow.

The center's Sleep Tech Elizabeth McBeth says these tips also help:

- Start a sleep ritual: Allow yourself 30 to 60 minutes of wind-down time prior to bedtime that does not include television, cellphone games, checking email or anything else overly stimulating. Be in bed about the same time each night and rise the same time each morning.
- Be comfortable: Your bedroom should be quiet, dark and cool.
- De-stress: Take a deep breath or meditate to set aside daytime worries.
- Food and caffeine intake: Don't eat a big meal less than two to three hours before bedtime. If you're hungry before bed, eat an apple with a slice of cheese or a piece of whole wheat toast. Stop caffeine about six hours before you want to fall sleep.

Yawn. I think this is practical information that can make everyone sleep easier. So much better than a poke in the ribs.

-- Janet Eastman

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liberalforlife — 10 days ago
The worst "sleep" I ever had was at a sleep clinic. I couldn't get comfortable with all those wires interfering with sleeping on my side....want an earache? Those wires were SO UNCOMFORTABLE....didn't sleep until I went home. Try going to the bathroom with those wires all over you! What did they "measure," I wonder....certainly not my sleep pattern!
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Janet Eastman | jeastman@oregonian.com — 11 days ago
What's your sleep technique?
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liberalforlife — 10 days ago
I would NEVER recommend a sleep study! Will never have another! I'd rather "rest in peace"!
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liberalforlife — 9 days ago
The sleep ritual described above is right for me. I will generally end my day by reading the sections of the newspaper that had not caught my interest in the morning. And, contrary to good advice, I have a snack and a tall glass of something cold while doing the newspaper puzzle page. Maybe the drink is why I need to get up three hours after going to sleep. (Nature has a way of ridding the body of excess water.)

Regular hours, whether 9PM-5AM or 11-7 also help a lot. And don't deviate too far on weekends. If you're on a 9-5 sleep schedule for work, try 11-7 on your off days, but don't do a 12M-11AM.....you will find the next 9-5 to be impossible!

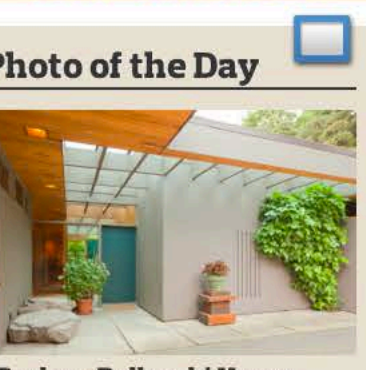
The cool room trick doesn't cut it with me....I want 75-77, because I am uncomfortable with heavy covers. If my ears and nose are cold, I can't sleep!
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