

Sleep easy and put your mind at rest

Getting a good night's sleep has become a major preoccupation for many people in the fast-paced world of the 21st century.

Sleep educator and stress-management consultant Brenda Rae Doherty says achieving that aim is usually a case of mind over matter. "Most poor sleepers can't let go of their day," she says. "For many people, evening is a time of activity, of getting the last task done before bed or worrying or planning for the next day. We often don't realise that even relaxing activities, such as watching television, can hinder our sleep if we do them before bed."

Doherty has worked in stress management for 25 years and for the past three years specialised only in sleep work at her clinic in Sydney.

She says the main causes of poor sleep are extremely common. "Typically, it's a combination of everyday stress, coupled with habits and activities that interrupt the body's natural process of preparing for sleep," she says. "Once we understand that the body itself has a sleep process, we can understand how to stop hindering it and learn simple techniques that encourage this process."

Research has shown that a lack of sleep can be linked to diabetes and an afternoon snooze can help protect against heart disease. Nevertheless, the perfect number of hours to sleep in a 24-hour

cycle is still not certain. "Nobody really knows," she says. "Generally a mature adult needs seven to eight hours, a tiny baby might need 18 to 20 hours and adolescents 10 hours, but as we get older, into our 60s, 70s and 80s, we need less sleep, maybe only five hours a night."

Doherty is conducting a one-day SleepEasy workshop in Canberra this Saturday to help people improve their sleep. Participants in the workshop come armed with pillow, blanket and socks. "Folk look forward not only to a practical education on the sleep process, but there is also time to have a nap," she says.

Canberra human-resources manager Tracy Bickell went to one of Doherty's workshops in Sydney about a year ago after having trouble sleeping for more than a decade.

She had upset her sleeping patterns while continually getting up early to study for her Higher School Certificate about 12 years earlier. A stressful job did not help and she couldn't sleep at all or had only fitful sleep for years. "I couldn't stop thinking about the day, thinking about work, and I was finding it very difficult to shut down," she says. "The more stressful the job, the worse it got so that I was really physically tired, but just couldn't fall asleep."

Bickell, 32, says attending one of Doherty's workshops and learning how to relax again had helped her to get a good



Brenda Rae Doherty: helping the sleep patterns of others.

night's sleep, but she stresses she had to be disciplined to adhere to Doherty's principles.

The SleepEasy Workshop is on Saturday, July 20 at the Canberra RSL, Moore Street, Civic. The cost is \$125. For bookings ring (02) 9977 0213.