

# **A lullaby and good night for Veterans**

Each morning you want to wake with a healthy mind and body. Better sleep leads to a heightened cognitive level and a well-functioning immune system, allowing your body to operate at its peak performance.

Southern AZ Veterans have tools to combat poor sleep habits.

The sleep lab at the VA medical center in Tucson has a six-bed lab that operates seven nights a week where they capable of doing full diagnostic testing, and robust home sleep testing program.

“In the lab test we can monitor the brain waves and look to see how much restful sleep they’re getting versus non restful sleep,” said Medical Instrument Technician Jeffrey Koebnick. “If we find that sufficient restful sleep is not being achieved, we can use other monitored leads to determine the cause.”

Disruptions keep the body in a transitional or real light stage of sleep, until it feels comfortable enough to get you some of the deeper stages of sleep.

“We're looking at all the physiological aspects if there's pauses in your breathing snoring late kicking teeth grinding anything that may be disrupting the sleep that will then disrupt their sleep patterns,” said Koebnick. “We're monitoring all that and trying to figure out what is physiologically that's going on that's disrupting that sleep.”

The brain will then wake you up, not always to the point where you remember it, but enough to take you from a restful sleep to a lighter non-restful state. This cycle can happen hundreds of times throughout the night leading to poor sleep.

“Sleep apnea is the most common diagnosis seen in the sleep lab,” said Koebnick. “This can happen when the muscles in the upper airway relax during sleep forming a closure in the back of the throat.”

This blockage does not allow air to get to the lungs and can cause oxygen desaturations.

“Over the long term the lack of quality sleep along with the oxygen desaturations can lead to hypertension, cardiac issues, and chances of strokes,” said Koebnick.

The treatment gold standard is CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) or some type of positive airway pressure.

“The styles of masks and pressure delivery of the CPAP machines have come a long way in the past several years,” said Koebnick. “Though there are several other options available If CPAP is not right for you. These options can be determined by complexity and severity of your apnea.”

It’s recommended that you try and be consistent with your sleep and wake times. Ensure your bedroom is dark and at a comfortable temperature. Limit your screen time before bed. Avoid caffeine and large meals before bedtime and try and find time for exercise

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during the day. The research that they're doing really supports that better sleep hygiene improves your overall health in so many areas.

VA offers SleepEZ digital cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, referred to as dCBT-I. SleepEZ helps to set a sleep schedule, modify sleep behaviors and reduce unhelpful thoughts.

Learn more at <https://www.veterantraining.va.gov/sleep/index.asp>.

