

Tips for a Good Night's Sleep and a Better Tomorrow

Sleep-Promoting Behaviors

- Go to bed only when you are sleepy. Do not go to bed just because it is “time.”
- Establish a standard, relaxing, soothing bedtime ritual. Your body likes routines, and a bedtime ritual will allow you to break the connection between the stress of the day and bedtime.
 - Put on your pajamas, wash your face, brush your teeth and get your clothes ready for the next morning to signal your brain you are preparing for sleep.
 - Play soothing music
 - Read a book or magazine if you find this it relaxing
 - Take a hot (about 104° F) 30 minute shower, or preferably bath, 1 ¾ to 2 hours before bedtime. We fall asleep as our body temperature begins to fall.
 - Do not fall asleep in your recliner or sofa with a television blasting in the background.
- Stop working at any task and attempt to resolve anything potentially stimulating, worrisome, or upsetting at least one hour before bedtime.
- Stop reading and watching TV at least one-half hour, and preferably longer, before going to bed. No matter how passively you watch television or how innocuous the book, your mind is still being aroused, which can make it difficult to fall to sleep.
- If worry, stress, or “mind racing” is preventing you from falling asleep, set aside time after dinner to mentally review all your concerns and issues, and keep a “worry journal.” Writing down your emotional worries and thoughts and converting them to a “To Do” list for the next day may help release these concerns from you mind so your subconscious can shut down for the night. Tell yourself, “I’ve made all my preparations, and everything is ready for tomorrow.” Keep the “worry journal” next to your bed.
- Learn a relaxation technique, such as progressive muscle relaxation. Practice and perfect the technique while awake before using it in bed.
- Nicotine and caffeine are stimulants. While initially a sedative that may make it easier to fall asleep, after it is cleared from your system, alcohol can cause sweats, headaches, nightmares, arousals and awakenings. Ideally, avoid caffeine-containing beverages (coffee, tea, sodas), food (chocolate) and prescription and over-the-counter medications at least 6 to 8 hours before bedtime. However, since caffeine can stay in your system for as long as 14 hours, a longer abstinence period may be required. If you consume large amounts of caffeine and stop too abruptly, you may get headaches. In this case, decrease the amount of caffeine more slowly. Avoid cigarettes before bedtime and during awakenings. Like caffeine, nicotine can stay in your system for 14 hours. Avoid alcohol completely, or at least 5 hours before bedtime.

- Do not lie awake in bed for more than 20 minutes, to avoid developing a negative association between your bedroom and sound sleep. After 20 minutes, leave the room and do something you find relaxing, such as reading or listening to music. Do not return to bed until you feel sleepy. Repeat as often as required.
- Do not go to bed too hungry or too full. Because your digestive system slows down during sleep, overeating can result in indigestion and heart burn, which can awaken you and keep you up when you are trying to sleep.
 - Avoid anything but a light snack 2 hours prior to bedtime.
 - If you have a light snack, eat it approximately 1 hour before bed.
 - High carbohydrate, low protein foods and drinks, and foods containing the amino acid L-tryptophan may actually help you fall asleep.
 - Juice, cookies and *Ovaltine* are high carbohydrate, low protein snacks; milk, eggs, cottage cheese, yogurt, tuna, chicken, turkey and cashews contain large amounts of L-tryptophan.
 - Add *Ovaltine* to warm or hot milk and drink it 15 minutes before bedtime.
 - Hot herb teas such as camomile, catnip, anise, or fennel may help you sleep.
 - Try not to drink fluids after 8 PM to avoid having to get up to go to the bathroom.
- Get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep a day, the average amount an adult requires.
- Try to maintain a consistent and regular sleep and wake schedule on work days **AND** days off/weekends. Regular times for sleep, meals, medications, chores, and other activities keep your inner body clock running smoothly and help your body know when to be alert and when to sleep. Going to bed and sleeping later on weekends can actually induce “jet lag,” making it difficult to get up come Monday morning.
- Avoid naps. However, if you take a nap, the best time is 8 hours after you awaken, but not after 3:30 PM. Late naps may make it difficult to fall asleep. Nap for 20 to 30 minutes and set an alarm. By allowing you to enter deep sleep, longer naps can actually make you feel groggy. If you are having difficulty falling asleep, avoid naps completely.
- Schedule 20 minutes of regular aerobic exercise and work it into your normal routine, but not within 4 hours of going to bed. Exercising raises the body temperature and can be alerting too close to bed time. Walk or bike to work instead of driving; climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator. Find an exercise buddy to make exercising more fun and keep you motivated. Exercise will improve your sleep, energy level, mood, stress and fitness.

Sleep Environment

- A darkened room signals your brain that it is time to sleep by allowing more melatonin, the “sleep hormone,” to be produced. So keep your bedroom as dark as possible. Standard window shades may let too much light in. Blackout shades, heavy curtains and eye masks can help. Cover an illuminated alarm clock. Use a small night-light to avoid turning on bright lights if you get up. It appears that a low-blue light may suppress melatonin production less than a regular night-light.
- If you are a “clock watcher,” cover it or remove it.
- Eliminate noise with earplugs, fans, air conditioners, or white noise machines. Install carpeting or sound absorbing curtains, drapes, or shades.



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- Invest in a good mattress. A poor or an old mattress can disrupt your sleep. Consider a new mattress if you continually wake up in the morning with aches, pains or stiffness. The average mattress lifespan is 5 to 7 years.
- Address your partner's sleep issues, if present. One partner's snoring, tossing and turning, or insomnia causes the other to lose, on average, nearly 1 hour of sleep a night. Consider a mattress that prevents your partner's movements from disturbing your side of the bed.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping and sex. Keep it stress and clutter-free. No paperwork, bills, unfolded laundry, TV, electronics, or pets. You want your brain to associate your bedroom with relaxation, not activity. Pets can disrupt your sleep through either allergies or their movement in bed.
- Keep your room well ventilated and the temperature on the cool side, ideally between 60 and 68 degrees (average: 65; range: below 75 and above 54 degrees). Temperatures in this range appear to facilitate the decrease in body temperature that initiates sleepiness. However, the ideal sleep temperature is very individual and you may need to experiment to find what is right for you. Pay attention to whether you continually kick your covers off or awaken sweating or shivering.
- Layering is often better than tight heavy covers, as it allows you to move and make adjustments as body temperature adjusts during the night. Loose clothing is better, particularly if sweating is a problem.