

10 TIPS FOR A BETTER NIGHT SLEEP



Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule including weekends.

Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by a "circadian clock" in our brain and the body's need to balance both sleep time and wake time. Waking up and going to sleep at the same time each day helps the circadian function, as does exposure to sunlight in the morning and darkness when it's time to sleep.



Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine.

To help your body wind down for bed, try engaging in relaxing activities such as listening to soothing music or taking a hot bath. If you are going to take a hot bath, be sure it's done early enough that you are no longer sweating or over-heated. Avoid bright lights and arousing activities like working, paying bills, playing competitive games or problem-solving.



Create a sleep-conducive environment.

Take some time to create an atmosphere conducive to sleep. Find ways to minimize noise and other distractions. A few simple modifications such as ear plugs, a device that emits "white noise", a humidifier, fan, blackout curtains, or eye shades may make the difference in helping you get the sleep you need. Also, check that your mattress is comfortable and supportive. If you have allergies, consider purchasing allergy proof pillow and mattress covers. If you are disturbed by your partner while sleeping, try a bigger bed or put twin beds side by side. If your pets are keeping you up, consider finding another place for your furry friends to snooze.



Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.

Make your room attractive and relaxing. To help you associate your bedroom with sleep, leave your work documents, computers and televisions in another room and let this room be a place for intimate activities and sleep only. No time for intimacy? Think again. Endorphins released by sex can help you relax and fall asleep.



Avoid caffeine 6-8 hours before bed time.

Caffeine is a stimulant and can keep you awake. Caffeine stays in the body an average of 3 to 5 hours, and for some people can affect them for up to 12 hours. Even if you don't think caffeine is a problem, it may be disrupting and changing the quality of your sleep. Avoiding all caffeinated products (coffee, teas and colas) within 6-8 hours of going to bed can help improve sleep quality.



Watch what you eat and drink before bed.

It is best to avoid eating a heavy meal 2-3 hours before bedtime. Avoid foods that can cause indigestion, gas or heartburn, such as fatty or spicy foods. Try to restrict fluids close to bedtime to prevent nighttime awakenings to go to the bathroom, though some people find milk or herbal, non-caffeinated teas to be soothing. If you are hungry at bedtime, eating a snack high in carbohydrates can help your body release serotonin, which naturally induces sleep in the body. Cheese and crackers, cereal and milk, or a banana or apple can be helpful.



Exercise regularly (but not right before bedtime).

A great time to exercise is late in the afternoon. Since a cooler body temperature is associated with sleep onset, try to wrap up your exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime. Some exercises to try include: aerobic workouts, walking, running, swimming, tennis, dancing, skiing, etc.



Avoid nicotine (e.g. cigarettes, tobacco products), especially close to bedtime.

Nicotine is also a stimulant. Smoking before bed makes it more difficult to fall asleep. When smokers go to sleep, they experience withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, which also cause sleep problems. Nicotine can cause difficulty falling asleep, problems waking in the morning, and may also cause nightmares. Difficulty sleeping is just one more reason to quit smoking. And never smoke in bed or when sleepy!



Avoid alcohol close to bedtime.

Although many people think of alcohol as a sedative, it actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings. Consuming alcohol leads to a night of less restful sleep.



Reduce stress as much as possible.

What we do during the day influences our sleep at night. If stress and worry are keeping you up, try integrating a few stress management techniques into your daily and/or evening ritual. This may include meditation, deep breathing, writing down your concerns or work tasks so you are not thinking of them before sleep and/or talking to a partner or trusted friend.

If you've tried these tips and you still find you have trouble falling asleep, maintaining sleep, awaken earlier than you wish, feel un-refreshed after sleep or suffer from excessive sleepiness during the day or when you wish to be alert, there may be an underlying cause for your sleep problems. It may be helpful to keep a sleep diary and consult with your physician.