

9 Tips for A Good Night's Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep can be easier than you think, if you just keep in mind some of these helpful tips. Remember, sleep is supposed to be *relaxing*. Good daily sleep helps to renew your body every night.

Do not make sleep a competition or skimp for too long (longer than a few days) on getting a good night's sleep of at least 7 to 8 hours per day. Everybody has trouble sleeping from time to time, so don't worry if you're having a stretch of having trouble sleeping. Try these tips to help return to a restful, natural sleep.

1. Set a schedule and keep a regular sleep schedule.

Go to bed at a set time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Disrupting this schedule may lead to insomnia. "Sleeping in" on weekends also makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because it re-sets your sleep cycles for a later awakening. Do not nap within 8 hours of bedtime.

2. Exercise.

Try to exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day. Daily exercise often helps people sleep, although a workout soon before bedtime may interfere with sleep. For maximum benefit, try to get your exercise about 5 to 6 hours before going to bed. Do not exercise within two hours of bedtime.

3. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.

Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, which acts as a stimulant and keeps people awake. Sources of caffeine include coffee, chocolate, soft drinks, non-herbal teas, diet drugs, and some pain relievers. Smokers tend to sleep very lightly and often wake up in the early morning due to nicotine withdrawal. Alcohol robs people of deep sleep and REM sleep and keeps them in the lighter stages of sleep. Avoid all of these things at least 6 to 8 hours before sleeping if you want a good night's sleep. Also, try to avoid eating any kind of large meal within two hours of bedtime.

4. Have a relaxing bedtime ritual.

A warm bath, reading, or another relaxing routine can make it easier to fall sleep. You can train yourself to associate certain restful activities with sleep and make them part of your bedtime ritual.

5. Sleep until sunlight.

If possible, wake up with the sun, or use very bright lights in the morning. Sunlight helps the body's internal biological clock reset itself each day. Sleep experts recommend exposure to an hour of morning sunlight for people having problems falling asleep.

6. Don't lie in bed awake.

If you can't get to sleep, don't just lie in bed. Do something else, like reading, watching television, or listening to music, until you feel tired. The anxiety of being unable to fall asleep can actually contribute to insomnia. Return to bed when you begin feeling sleepy, and try to avoid sleeping in locations other than your bed.

7. Control your room environment and temperature.

Maintain a comfortable temperature in the bedroom. Extreme temperatures may disrupt sleep or prevent you from falling asleep. Ensure a dark, quiet environment whenever possible. Try to avoid going to sleep with the television or radio on, because it can be a bad habit that leads to the need to have the TV or radio on every time you try and sleep.

8. Darken your bedroom — completely.

Recent research has shown that a dark bedroom helps us sleep better and more completely every night. Studies found that even small things — like the glow of your clock or LEDs from another device in your bedroom can reduce the overall quality of your sleep.

9. See a doctor if your sleeping problem continues.

If you have trouble falling asleep night after night, or if you always feel tired the next day, then you may have a sleep disorder and should see a physician. Your primary care physician may be able to help you; if not, you can probably find a sleep specialist at a major hospital near you. Most sleep disorders can be treated effectively, so you can finally get that good night's sleep you need.

Things you can do to promote good sleep

- Maintain a regular sleep routine
- Go to bed at the same time. Wake up at the same time. Ideally, your schedule will remain the same (+/- 20 minutes) every night of the week.
- Avoid naps if possible
- Naps decrease the 'Sleep Debt' that is so necessary for easy sleep onset.
- Each of us needs a certain amount of sleep per 24-hour period. We need that amount, and we don't need more than that.
- When we take naps, it decreases the amount of sleep that we need the next night – which may cause sleep fragmentation and difficulty initiating sleep, and may lead to insomnia.
- Don't stay in bed awake for more than 5-10 minutes.
- If you find your mind racing, or worrying about not being able to sleep during the middle of the night, get out of bed, and sit in a chair in the dark. Do your mind racing in the chair until you are sleepy, then return to bed. No TV or internet during these periods! That will just stimulate you more than desired.
- If this happens several times during the night, that is OK. Just maintain your regular wake time, and try to avoid naps.
- Don't watch TV or read in bed.
- When you watch TV or read in bed, you associate the bed with wakefulness.
- The bed is reserved for two things – sleep and hanky panky.
- Do not drink caffeine inappropriately

- The effects of caffeine may last for several hours after ingestion. Caffeine can fragment sleep, and cause difficulty initiating sleep. If you drink caffeine, use it only before noon.
- Remember that soda and tea contain caffeine as well.
- Avoid inappropriate substances that interfere with sleep
- Cigarettes, alcohol, and over-the-counter medications may cause fragmented sleep.
- Exercise regularly
- Exercise before 2 pm every day. Exercise promotes continuous sleep.
- Avoid rigorous exercise before bedtime. Rigorous exercise circulates endorphins into the body which may cause difficulty initiating sleep.
- Have a quiet, comfortable bedroom
- Set your bedroom thermostat at a comfortable temperature. Generally, a little cooler is better than a little warmer.
- Turn off the TV and other extraneous noise that may disrupt sleep. Background 'white noise' like a fan is OK.
- If your pets awaken you, keep them outside the bedroom.
- Your bedroom should be dark. Turn off bright lights.
- If you are a 'clock watcher' at night, hide the clock.
- Have a comfortable pre-bedtime routine
- A warm bath, shower
- Meditation, or quiet time