

How to Sleep Well (Sleep Hygiene Tips)



Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to sleep. Tossing and turning. Your mind is racing, going over everything that happened today. Night noises keep you awake. What can you do? There ARE things you can do! Read on and learn some new tricks to sleep well. These tips are also known as "Sleep Hygiene."

- **Sleep only when sleepy.**
This reduces the time you're awake in bed.
- **If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something boring until you feel sleepy.**
Sit quietly in the dark or read something that makes you sleepy. Don't expose yourself to bright light while you're up. The light gives cues to your brain that it's time to wake up.
- **Don't take naps.**
This will ensure that you're tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, sleep less than one hour before 3 PM.
- **Get up and go to bed at the same time every day.**
Do this even on weekends until your sleep cycle has a regular rhythm and you start feeling better.
- **Refrain from exercise at least 3-4 hours before bedtime.**
Regular exercise is recommended to help you sleep well, but the timing of the workout is important. Try early morning or early afternoon.
- **Develop sleep rituals.**
Sleep rituals give your body cues that it's time to slow down and sleep. Listen to relaxing music, read something soothing, have a cup of caffeine free tea, do relaxation exercises. An hour before bedtime, put away all technology with screens (cell phones, computers, TV, iPods) or at least put your technology on night time mode so the screen is dimmer and less bright. Research shows that bright light can trick your mind into thinking it's time to be awake. This can affect production of melatonin, your brain's natural hormone that helps control your daily week-sleep cycles.
- **Only use your bed for sleeping.**
Refrain from using your bed to watch TV, do school work/other types of work, or reading. Then, when you go to bed, your body knows it's time to sleep.
- **Stay away from caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol at least 4-6 hours before bed.**
Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with people's ability to fall asleep. Coffee, tea, soda, cocoa, chocolate, and some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine. Cigarettes and some drugs contain nicotine. Alcohol may seem to help people sleep in the beginning as it slows brain activity, but they will end up having fragmented sleep.

- **Have a light snack before bed.**

If your stomach is too empty or if you eat a heavy meal before bedtime, that can interfere with sleep. Dairy products and turkey contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer. Tryptophan is also in milk and is probably why a warm glass of milk is sometimes recommended.

- **Take a hot shower or bath 90 minutes before bedtime.**

A hot bath or shower will raise your body temperature. After the bath or shower, the subsequent drop in body temperature can help you feel sleepy.

- **Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable.**

A hot room can be uncomfortable. A cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm is recommended. If light in the early morning bothers you, get a blackout shade or wear a sleep mask. If noise bothers you, wear earplugs or get a white noise machine/fan.

- **Use sunlight to set your biological clock.**

As soon as you get up in the morning, go outside or open the blinds so that you're exposed to the sun for 15 minutes. It sounds silly, but it works for some people.