



Sleep Habits: As Important as Diet and Exercise—Only Easier!

Sleep Hygiene Recommendations

- **Go to bed only when sleepy**

If your body is not ready for sleep, you cannot force it to sleep. Many people are on the go all day, including right up until bedtime, and think they can just jump into bed and fall asleep. Going to bed when sleepy, will reduce the time you are awake in bed and reduce the frustration.

- **Develop sleep rituals**

Develop a ritual to let your body know to prepare for bed. Include things that you enjoy and that relax you. Listen to relaxing music, read a book or short story for 15 minutes, or have a cup of caffeine-free tea. Relaxation techniques such as stretching, yoga, and deep breathing may also help relieve anxiety, reduce muscle tension, and allow you to fall asleep easier.

- **If you can't fall asleep to the point of becoming frustrated, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy**

Go back to your nightly ritual to give your body a cue to wind down. Do not expose yourself to bright light while you are up. Do not perform activities that wake you up more. Avoid work-related activities, cooking, cleaning, use of the computer, or television.

- **Don't take your worries and responsibilities to bed.**

If you are worried about something or making "to do" lists in your head as you try to sleep, you may have trouble falling asleep. Try to leave your worries behind when you go to bed. Find time before bed to think about these issues and make your lists.

- **Take a hot bath 1 ½ - 2 hours before bedtime**

There is some evidence that this may help some people. Give it a try—it may help!

- **Have a light snack before bed**

If your stomach is empty and growling, it can interfere with sleep. Eat a light meal, as a heavy meal can interfere with sleep. Make sure the snack does not contain chocolate as it has stimulant properties and may interfere with sleep. Your mother was right about that warm glass of milk!! Warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas and turkey, may help you to sleep.

- **Stay away from caffeine, nicotine and alcohol at least 4-6 hours before bed**

Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to fall asleep, and stay asleep. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, hot cocoa, chocolate and some over-the-counter medicines contain caffeine. Cigarettes, cigars, and some drugs contain nicotine. Although alcohol may help you fall asleep, it significantly interferes with the quality of your sleep and often makes you wake up more in the second half of the night.

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Sleep Hygiene Recommendations (continued)

- **Get up and go to bed the same time every day**

The human body likes regularity in most everything, including sleep. Keeping yourself on a regular schedule (even on the weekends) will keep your sleep in a natural rhythm.

- **Don't take naps**

If you nap throughout the day, is it any wonder you have trouble sleeping at night? The avoidance of naps keeps your body in rhythm and ensures you are appropriately sleepy at bedtime. It is normal to feel sleepy in the late afternoon but most people can avoid falling asleep. If you feel that you absolutely cannot make it through the day without a nap, make sure that it is at least 6 hours before bedtime and lasts less than 45 minutes. If you are having trouble sleeping at night, eliminate naps completely.

- **Refrain from exercise at least 2 hours before bedtime**

Regular exercise is recommended for your overall health, but can also help you sleep better. The time you exercise is important though! Exercising in the morning or early afternoon will not interfere with sleep. Exercising late in the evening can make it more difficult to fall asleep.

- **Only use your bed for the three "S" activities**

The bed should be for sleep, sickness, andintimacy only. It is best to leave all other activities for elsewhere! Refrain from using your bed for watching TV, paying bills, eating, doing paperwork, computer work, or prolonged reading. Let your body "know" what the bed is for!

- **Optimize your sleep environment**

Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable. If you live in a noisy area, earplugs, heavy curtains, or a white noise machine might help. If you are sensitive to morning light, make sure your curtains block light in the morning or try wearing an eye covering. The temperature of your room is important as well. A hot room can be uncomfortable and interfere with sleep. A cool (not cold) room with appropriately warm bed covers is recommended. An uncomfortable mattress or bedding can also interfere with sleep. Evaluate your sleep environment and make sure it is the best it can be.

- **Do not watch the clock**

Many people who are having difficulty sleeping check the clock to see how long it is taking to fall asleep, how long they have been asleep, or how much longer they have left to sleep. This can be a source of frustration and should be avoided.

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

When you get up in the morning, get exposure to bright light, preferably sunlight. Light signals that it is morning and you should wake up. Getting 15 minutes of sunlight exposure in the morning can make your entire day better and brighter! Sleep is not an option! Your health, happiness, productivity and even safety depend on how well you meet your body's need for rest and sleep quality. Consider sleep habits as important as your diet and exercise.