

How to Get a Good Night's Sleep

If you're not sleeping well, chances are, your mood, energy and concentration are affected too. Here are several tips that many people find helpful for sleep. Pick the ones that suit your lifestyle, and start feeling better!

Maintain a regular schedule.

- Whenever possible, go to bed at the same time each day and get up at the same time each day. Try to maintain something close to this on weekends.
- If you slept poorly and are tired, try to keep your routine the same the next day, but go to bed a little earlier.
- Avoid napping during the day.

Exercise daily.

- There is good evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. The most important thing about exercise is to find something that you enjoy doing, whether it's your favorite sport, dancing, running, swimming, weight lifting, or a fitness class.
- If money is an issue, www.fitnessblender.com has free online fitness classes you can do at home, for all experience levels; some don't require you to have any equipment.
- Avoid getting your heart rate up right before bedtime; in the evening, the best exercises are gentle ones such as yoga and pilates.

Regulate your light exposure. Light affects our brain chemistry to stimulate wakefulness or sleepiness.

- *Daytime:*
 - Get regular exposure to outdoor or bright lights during the day.
 - During winter, a light alarm clock can help with awakening.
 - Bright lamps designed for Seasonal Affective Disorder, when used in the morning, will increase alertness.
- *At night:*
 - Within 1-2 hours of bedtime, avoid exposure to bright lights, and screens. Screens emit bluish-white light that is similar to daylight, so it stimulates your brain into wakefulness and inhibits melatonin.
 - If you must use electronics, then dim the screen, and use a program to filter out the bluish end of the light spectrum. This will turn your screen yellower; warmer tones are less stimulating to the brain. On an iPhone, use the "night shift" setting; on a computer, try "f.lux"; or search your device's apps for "blue light filter".
 - Before bed, use candles or a nightlight, or have a dim or reddish lamp, instead of a bright overhead light.
 - Keep the bedroom dark; use blackout curtains or an eye mask.

Make your bedroom your sleep sanctuary.

- Use your bed only for sleep, snuggles, and sex. Keep the bed clear of laundry, electronics, and other belongings. This will help you associate your bed with sleep, not with other activities that are more stressful or stimulating.
- If you have a home or apartment with other rooms that you can use for other activities such as paperwork and computer work, then consider keeping the entire bedroom as a sacred space.
- If you have money to spend, consider indulging in a new set of soft sheets, an ergonomic pillow, or other products that make your bed feel like a cozy sanctuary, so that you look forward to being there. If not, do the laundry and enjoy the feel of fresh, clean sheets.

Block out distracting sounds.

- Noises, such as those from traffic or roommates, can keep us awake. Wear earplugs, or use white noise.
- For white noise, use a fan or air purifier, or an app connected with your speakers or earbuds. For iPhones, the free app "Ambiance" includes options for rain, river, ocean, forest, and other calming background noises that will play on loop all night if needed.
- Put your phone on airplane mode while you sleep, so that you need not worry about texts, alerts or other interruptions. If you are waiting to hear from a loved one, use "do not disturb" mode and make an exception for that person in your settings, so you are not interrupted by people other than the one intended.
- Keep other electronic devices out of the room if at all possible.

Cool down.

- Keep the temperature in your bedroom cool to support sleep.
- Try taking a hot bath or shower before bed. This will warm you to the core and prompt your body temperature to cool down afterward, which induces sleep.

Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine.

- Relaxing rituals prior to bedtime may include a warm bath or shower, aromatherapy, reading something relaxing (such as your favorite fiction), drawing or painting, meditation, breathing exercises, yin yoga, prayer, gratitude journaling, self-massage or partner massage, herbal tea, or listening to soothing music.
- Self-massage with oil, especially on the feet, is an Ayurvedic remedy for sleep.
- Ask your therapist if you need some ideas for a bedtime routine that works for you.

Keep stressors at bay.

- If you need to, keep a journal or notepad near the bed so that you can quickly jot down any ideas or concerns that come up before bed. Then, let them go; designate a different time for problem-solving. Put it in your planner, if need be.
- If you are in a relationship, agree with your partner that you two can choose appropriate times for discussing more challenging subjects. Use the hour before bed for relaxation and affection. If the relationship is too stressful to accommodate this boundary, contact a couples counselor or your local domestic violence crisis hotline.

Watch your caffeine intake.

- Too much caffeine during the day will keep you awake at night and may also increase anxiety, so cut down your caffeine intake, especially later in the day.
- If you feel tired during the day, instead of reaching for that energy drink, instead drink some water, have a healthy snack, or move your body for a few minutes to get your blood flowing.

Be gentle with yourself.

- Don't try to force yourself to sleep, criticize yourself for having difficulty sleeping, or engage in catastrophic thinking, i.e. "I'll never get to sleep," or "My day tomorrow will be ruined." Let these stressful thoughts go.
- Try not to watch the clock or count the minutes. If you find yourself stressing over not sleeping, get up and do something lighthearted to distract yourself, then go back to bed.
- It helps to take a gentle, flexible and compassionate attitude toward yourself. The last thing you need is one more thing to worry about! If you need help with anxiety, try a mindfulness practice, positive affirmation, or CBT.

Eat well for sleep:

- Don't go to bed too full or too hungry. Try to eat dinner at least 3 hours before bed.
- Consider a light snack before bed, especially one containing tryptophan, an amino acid that supports serotonin production and helps induce feelings of relaxation. High tryptophan foods include nuts, seeds, tofu, cheese, red meat, chicken, turkey, fish, oats, beans, lentils, and eggs.
- In general, try to eat a balanced diet rich in protein, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals. Have some protein every few hours and do not rely on sugar or caffeine for energy. This will help you manage stress and energy overall.
- Avoid alcohol; while it may help you feel tired, it will actually interrupt your sleep cycle.
- Drink lots of water throughout the day, but less at night, so you don't have to get up to urinate at night.

Talk with a medical professional about pills and supplements.

- If you are prescribed a sleep aid, or take an over-the-counter sleep aid, remember that these can be habit-forming and can lose their efficacy over time; use them only when you really need them. Talk with your doctor, and don't take another person's pills.
- Consult with a nutritionist. Many people are deficient in minerals such as calcium and magnesium that regulate the nervous system; these nutrient deficiencies can affect anxiety and sleep. Natural Calm is an easily digestible magnesium supplement many people find calming before bed. Other nutrients, such as B-vitamins, affect our ability to handle stress. If you live in the Pacific Northwest, you probably need to supplement your Vitamin D intake during the winter. If you aren't already taking a multivitamin with breakfast, consider taking one.
- Talk with your herbalist or naturopath about sleep-inducing herbs that can be found at your local natural grocer, such as valerian root, oatstraw, skullcap, and chamomile.
- Melatonin is a chemical naturally produced by our brains to regulate sleep; it can also be purchased over the counter as a sleep aid. The tips on light exposure, above, will help you naturally regulate your brain's melatonin. In addition, many people find it helpful for sleep when taken as a supplement. Research and discuss this with your doctor. If you take melatonin, try to take it at the same time every night, half an hour before bed.