

Tips for More Restful Sleep

Morning Routine

The transition from sleep to being awake can be a challenging process if you are not sleeping enough or if you awake feeling tired. Try any of these tips to feel more rested after sleep.

- **Get up at the same time every morning.** Sleeping in on weekends can make waking up on Monday morning more difficult. Maintaining a regular rhythm in your sleep cycle will help you to wake up and even fall asleep with greater ease.
- **Wake up with natural sunlight** or use bright lights in the morning. Sunlight helps reset your body's internal clock.
- **Enjoy a few deep breaths and/or meditate** for 5 - 10 minutes.
- **Stretch.** Try some gentle stretches, yoga, or easy movements to wake up your muscles.
- **Eat a nourishing breakfast.** Take the time to eat a wholesome breakfast that will help to regulate your metabolism. For example, an energy-rich meal could include whole-grain cereal with fruit and a source of protein, such as milk, yogurt, or eggs.

During the Day

Sleep may be far from your mind as you go about your day, but there are some habits that may help or interfere with your ability to sleep at night. Try to include one of these during the day for a more restful night's sleep.

- **Enjoy the outdoors.** Get out in the sun every day, even for only a few minutes.
- **Exercise.** Walking, swimming, or bicycling are just a few ways of reducing stress-related insomnia. Enjoy 20 to 30 minutes of any type of exercise every day.
- **Choose the right time to workout.** Exercise helps change brain chemistry, and a well-timed workout can help you sleep better. Studies show that exercising in the afternoon, 5 or 6 hours before bedtime may be ideal, since it gives your body a chance to cool down. Avoid exercising too close to bed because it may stimulate your body and keep you awake and alert.
- **Limit long daytime naps.** Napping may interrupt your sleep at night. If you do need a nap, try to limit it to less than an hour. You can also recharge during a short rest by lying on the floor and elevating your legs and feet on a chair, above heart-level.
- **Avoid caffeine before bedtime.** Caffeine has a stimulating effect on most people. It is found in beverages such as coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate, as well as in certain medications, diet pills, or pain relievers. Read package ingredients carefully and check for sleep warnings.
- **In the evenings, choose foods that are light, less spicy, and low in sugar.** When eaten 4-6 hours before bedtime, these ingredients may affect your ability to stay asleep.
- **Be aware of the medications you are taking,** particularly diuretics, which increase urination. It may be better to take these earlier, to avoid waking to use the bathroom at night.
- **If you smoke, consider quitting.** Nicotine is a stimulant. Studies show that smokers have more trouble falling asleep and wake up more often during the night.

Evening Routine

Your evening activities have a great effect on your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Pay attention to your behaviors during this time of day, and think about how you might be able to change your everyday habits to your advantage. Try any of these to improve your sleep.

- **Go to bed at a set time each night.** Your body will grow accustomed to falling asleep at a certain time if you go to bed near the same time each night. Establishing a regular bedtime is an essential component of good sleeping habits.
- **Eat a light dinner by 7:00 pm,** but do not go to bed hungry. A light snack such as walnuts, bananas, whole grain crackers, or a glass of milk help you get to sleep. A heavy dinner eaten too close to bedtime, on the other hand, might interfere with your sleep.
- **Avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.** Alcohol may help you fall asleep, but, as alcohol levels in your system start to fall, a stimulant effect can keep you up.
- **Leave your worries at the bedroom door.** Before bedtime, limit your conversations on topics that will leave you feeling anxious (such as finances, family problems, school, and work). If you find yourself discussing these issues, try to resolve your feelings before going to sleep.
- **Relax before bed.** The best evening activities are those that calm you, such as reading, writing, meditating, or discussing your day with a friend or loved one. Light exercise, like gentle yoga may also help you sleep. Avoid vigorous activity or over-stimulating television programs.
- **Develop sleep rituals.** Give your body cues that it is time to slow down. Try listening to relaxing music, breathing deeply (exhalations slightly longer than inhalations), taking a warm bath, or drinking a cup of soothing non-caffeinated tea, like chamomile or valerian, before bed.

Your Sleeping Environment

What you see, hear, smell, and touch in your sleep setting can affect your ability to fall and to stay asleep. Be mindful when creating your sleep environment.

- **Be comfortable.** Your sleeping conditions and bed should be as comfortable as possible. A dark quiet bedroom with the room temperature at 65 - 70° F is ideal. If noise bothers you, consider ear plugs or listening to a soothing CD or podcast.
- **Elevate the head of the bed** on wooden blocks of four to six inches to make breathing easier. Or use extra pillows to elevate your chest, shoulders and head.
- **Use a vaporizer.** Warm, moist air can make breathing easier, especially where the air is dry.
- **Listen to nature.** The sounds of the outdoors or a nature recording can soothe.
- **Silence or avoid distractions from your partner.** If you sleep with a snoring or restless partner, try using earplugs or headphones or make temporary sleeping arrangements until you re-establish a satisfactory sleeping pattern.
- **Reserve your bed for sleeping and sexual activities only.** Avoid watching TV, paying bills, working, or reading while in bed. When you go to bed, you want your body to know it is time to sleep.

If You Cannot Sleep...

- **Don't force yourself to stay in bed**, worrying that you aren't sleeping. If you can't fall asleep in 15-30 minutes, or wake during the night, unable to fall back asleep – get out of bed.
- **Try relaxing activities until you feel sleepy.** You might want to get up and fix yourself a light snack, move to another room, gently stretch, or take a bath. Avoid bright light and watching television. Avoid focusing on the clock.
- **Remember to be Patient.** When changing any habit, it may take 2 – 4 weeks of following these suggestions before you notice improvement in your sleep. You may need to practice your new sleep habits for at least 3 months for a lasting effect. You might try keeping a sleep log so that you can record any improvements. If you want to change to an earlier bedtime, do so in 15 minute increments.

Resources

Hill Physicians online health center devoted to **Sleep** provides health information including more self-care tips; interactive tools; a free guided imagery podcast series, ***A Better Night's Sleep***; and more resources to help you start sleeping better. Learn more at www.HillPhysicians.com/Sleep.

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