

SLEEP HYGIENE

Sleep hygiene (our habits around sleep) can have a huge impact on our sleep quality and quantity. We may stay up too late and get up too early, or disrupt our sleep cycles with chemicals (alcohol and caffeine are big culprits) or overstimulating late-night activities (like watching TV too late or endlessly scroll through social media on our phones). Below are some essentials of good sleep habits.

PERSONAL HABITS

SET A FIXED BEDTIME AND WAKE TIME

By setting a fixed time to go to sleep and time to wake up each day, and keeping those times consistent, our bodies will begin to automatically recognize when it is time to sleep each night and will slide into a restful state more easily. It is important to keep the times consistent—don't stay up or get up later just because it's the weekend or you don't have any plans for the next day.

IF YOU'RE AN ADULT, TRY TO SKIP THE NAP

If you are exhausted or not feeling well, a nap can be helpful if limited to 30-45 minutes, but naps longer than that (and later in the day) can cause you to push bedtime back, causing further disruptions to your target bedtime.

ALCOHOL CAN MAKE SLEEP WORSE

Although it may sound counterintuitive since alcohol often makes us feel drowsy, it actually worsens sleep. While alcohol has an immediate sleep-inducing effect, a few hours later, as levels in your blood start to fall, there is a stimulating, or "wake-up," effect.

AVOID CERTAIN FOODS AND BEVERAGES LATE IN THE DAY

Caffeine (found in coffee, tea, soda, and chocolate) is a stimulant that makes us more awake and alert and it can affect us for several hours after consumption. It is best to stop caffeine intake at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime. It is also best to avoid heavy/rich, spicy, and/or sugary foods 4 to 6 hours before bedtime. Nicotine is another stimulant best avoided for several hours before bed.

EXERCISE—JUST NOT RIGHT BEFORE BED

Think that wearing yourself out before bed will make you sleep better? While exercising regularly is great for our bodies, doing so right before bed can keep us wide awake due to endorphins. Instead, try exercising in the afternoon; regular exercise, particularly in the afternoon, can help deepen sleep.

SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

SEEK COMFORT

If we are uncomfortable, we may fuss and fidget in search of coziness. Consider your sleep attire, mattress, pillow, and bedding: do you need a mattress pad? Is that flannel pajama set actually itchy? Does your pillow properly support your neck?



SEEK DARKNESS, QUIET, AND COOLNESS

Light, noise, and temperature all play important roles in creating an environment that supports a good night's rest. Light should be minimal, sounds should be soothing, and for adults the temperature should be between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit. In some cases, tools may be necessary to help ameliorate less-than-ideal sleep environments: noise canceling headphones and sound machines can help with loud environments, or for a cheaper fix, pick up a box of earplugs for a few dollars. Blackout curtains and eye masks are options to create the ideal level of darkness needed. An air conditioner, fan or space heater can all help you adjust for the right temperature.

THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT YOUR SLEEPING COMPANIONS

Partners, children, and pets in our beds can impact our sleep. Having those we care about close during sleep can be comforting, but a partner's snoring, a child's tossing and turning, even a dog's wet nose against our face, can accidentally rouse us from sleep. Consider what is best for your sleep and adjust as necessary: nasal strips for snoring bouts, an emergency cot for midnight visits from little ones, and a cozy pet bed are some tools for keeping the ones we love near without ruining our sleep.

BEDS ARE NOT OFFICES, LIVING ROOMS, OR DINING ROOMS

Your bed should have limited use: reserve your bed for sleep and sex only, to the extent possible. Bedtime is also not the ideal time for an emotional discussion with your partner. Plan a time for the next day when you can properly think about and discuss concerns and big topics (this also goes for talking to yourself—see below, *BEDTIME ROUTINE: Leave Worries Outside the Bedroom*).

A Special Note on Devices and Bedtime

Many people fall asleep with the television on in their room or will use TV as an aid to fall asleep, but TV (or programs and videos viewed on phones, laptops, and tablets) so close to bedtime is generally unadvisable, as it can be very engaging and stimulating. Try keeping devices out of the bedroom.

BEDTIME ROUTINE

RITUALS HELP OUR BODIES PREPARE FOR SLEEP

Establish a pre-sleep ritual. This may include a warm bath, brushing your teeth, and reading for a short period. Whatever you include in your routine, make sure that none of the components are overly stimulating. Try doing them in the same order each night as a way to cue your body that sleep is near.

A LIGHT SNACK CAN HELP

As mentioned above, eating foods that are too heavy before bed can cause poor sleep, however, a small snack that is free of alcohol, caffeine, and other stimulants can help you sleep better. Warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas, may help you to sleep.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT RELAXATION

It's nice to think that relaxation will just happen if our 'to do' list is done, but like everything else, relaxation is a habit we have to practice. Relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, and yoga (as long as it's not an intense workout) may help relieve anxiety and reduce muscle tension.



LEAVE WORRIES OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM

Bedtime shouldn't be the time to worry about the rest of your life, but for many of us, as soon as we close our eyes, our minds are flooded with a million thoughts and concerns. Learning to put worries aside can be challenging, but one tool you might try is to schedule a specific time of day for worrying. Aim for a time several hours before bed and set a time limit (ex: 30 minutes). When you start to worry at bedtime, set those worries aside for your scheduled worry time the next day.

OTHER FACTORS

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS CAN IMPACT SLEEP

Discomfort from physical concerns such as arthritis, acid reflux/heartburn, and hot flashes, among others, can lead to difficulty sleeping. If you are suffering from sleep trouble due to a physical condition, speak to your healthcare provider for advice on how to alleviate symptoms.

MENTAL HEALTH CAN IMPACT SLEEP

Psychological and mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, and stress are often associated with sleeping difficulty. In fact, difficulty staying asleep may be the only presenting sign of depression for some individuals. Discussing sleep troubles with a physician and mental health practitioner are great steps for finding the root of sleep troubles.

MEDICATIONS

Many medications can cause sleeplessness as a side effect. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if medications you are taking can lead to sleeplessness. To help overall improvement in sleep patterns, your doctor may prescribe sleep medications for short-term relief of a sleep problem or suggest behavioral changes, such as the ones listed in this guide. The decision to take sleeping aids is a medical one to be made in the context of your overall health.

DETERMINE HOW MUCH SLEEP IS RIGHT FOR YOU

While 8 hours is typically touted as *the* magic number for sleep, sleep needs actually vary. Adults typically need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night. Take a look at your sleep tendencies to see where you fall. Reflect on how you feel when you get different amounts of sleep. Maybe you're able to schedule 8 hours of sleep but actually feel your best when you get 7 hours—more isn't always better.

MIDNIGHT WAKINGS

Waking during sleep is normal—we typically wake several times during the night and, if sleep conditions are good, drift easily back to sleep. But if you find that you cannot get back to sleep within 15 to 20 minutes, you probably need a sleep reset. Get out of bed, leave the bedroom, and revisit your bedtime routine (have a light snack, read, or try another quiet, activity). Do not perform challenging or engaging activities or watch TV. When you start to feel sleepy again, try going back to bed.

