

Sleep Hygiene Tips

If you are not able to get enough and good quality sleep, so many aspects of your life are affected. Changing sleeping habits and seeing benefits can be frustrating things because it can take time to notice a difference. So stick with it and recognize the subtle changes. These small changes can make a big difference.

A few things we know about sleep....

- We have a biological rhythm to sleep. This is referred to as our circadian rhythm and is the natural internal process that regulates our sleep and wake cycle. When working correctly this resets every 24 hours and helps us with falling asleep, staying asleep and waking up.
- Our lives today include many factors that can disrupt this sleep rhythm. Some of these things we have control over and some we might not. Look over this list and determine what might be impacting your sleep rhythm.
 - Exposure to artificial light verses natural light during the day
 - Exposure and time spent in front of blue light from electronics
 - Amount of intake of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, marijuana and other substances
 - Noise and sleep environment
 - Impact and levels of stress
- By making some changes to your routine, habits and environment you can start to reset your circadian rhythm.

What you can do....

- CREATE A ROUTINE** that includes a regular sleep schedule (even on weekends) and steps you go through each night that helps your brain and body know it is time to slow down and go to sleep.
- USE OF LIGHT** can be make a big impact. If you can get 10-30 minutes of natural light exposure within 1 hour of waking up and then decrease light exposure within 1-2 hours before bed time, this helps reset that internal clock. Use of specific UV lights can also be used if natural light is not an option.
- WATCH CAFFEINE INTAKE** and shoot for no caffeine 6-8 hours before bedtime. Caffeine disturbs sleep; even for people who do not think they experience a stimulation effect. Individuals with insomnia are often more sensitive to mild stimulants than normal sleepers. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, soda, chocolate, and many over-the-counter medications (e.g., Excedrin).

- **AVOID NICOTINE** before bed. Nicotine is a stimulant. It is a myth that smoking helps you “relax.” As nicotine builds in the system it produces an effect similar to caffeine. DO NOT smoke to get yourself back to sleep.

- **AVOID ALCOHOL** and especially after dinner. Alcohol often promotes the onset of sleep, but as alcohol is metabolized sleep becomes disturbed and fragmented. Thus, a large amount of alcohol is a poor sleep aid and should not be used as such. Limit alcohol use to small quantities to moderate quantities.

- **BE CAREFUL OF SLEEPING PILLS.** Scientists have shown that sleep medications lose their effectiveness in about 2 - 4 weeks when taken regularly. Over time, sleeping pills actually make sleep problems worse. When sleeping pills have been used for a long period, withdrawal from the medication can lead to an insomnia rebound. Thus, after long-term use, many individuals incorrectly conclude that they “need” sleeping pills in order to sleep normally.

- **REGULAR EXERCISE.** Exercise in the late afternoon or early evening can aid sleep, although the positive effect often takes several weeks to become noticeable. Do not exercise within 2 hours of bedtime because it may elevate your nervous system activity and interfere with falling asleep.

- **BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT:** Moderate temperature, quiet, dark and comfortable. Extremes of heat or cold can disrupt sleep. Noises can be masked with background white noise (such as the noise of a fan) or with earplugs. Bedrooms may be darkened with black-out shades or sleep masks can be worn. Position clocks out-of-sight since clock-watching can increase worry about the effects of lack of sleep. Be sure your mattress is not too soft or too firm and that your pillow is the right height and firmness.

- **EATING.** You should avoid the following foods at bedtime: anything caffeinated like chocolate, peanuts, beans, most raw fruits and vegetables (they may cause gas), and high-fat foods such as potato chips or corn chips. Be especially careful to avoid heavy meals and spices in the evening. Do not go to bed too hungry or too full. Avoid snacks in the middle of the night because awakening may become associated with hunger. A light bedtime snack, such a glass of warm milk, cheese, or a bowl of cereal can promote sleep.

- **NAPS.** The sleep you obtain during the day takes away from your sleep needed at night resulting in lighter, more restless sleep, difficulty falling asleep or early morning awakening. If you must nap, keep it brief, and try to schedule it before 3:00 pm. It is best to set an alarm to ensure you don't sleep more than 15-30 minutes.

- **UNWIND.** Allow yourself at least an **hour** before bedtime to wind down. The brain is not a light switch that you can instantly cut on and off. Most of us cannot expect to go full speed till 10:00 pm then fall peacefully to sleep at 10:30 pm. Take a hot bath, read a novel, watch some TV, or have a pleasant talk with your spouse or kids. Find what works for you and make it your routine before bed. Be sure not to struggle with a problem, get into an argument before bed or anything else that increases your body's arousal.

Remember

It usually takes 2-3 months for a sleep problem to get totally better, but most people see improvements within 2-3 weeks if they consistently follow the guidelines.