

How to Sleep Better

Sleep is the natural way to restore the body and mind to normal functioning. The amount of sleep a person needs varies from person to person and generally decreases with age. Most people need 7-8 hours sleep but some people can manage on as little as 4-5 hours. Approximately one quarter of our sleep is spent in dreaming and a normal good night's sleep includes a few brief awakenings.

It is estimated that one person in three experiences some sort of sleep problem in any year and that **15-20% of all adults regularly have trouble sleeping**. Some people have trouble falling asleep, others wake and then have trouble going back to sleep. Worry or depression may interfere with sleep or others may sleep lightly and wake easily.

To improve sleep, make it a priority like a healthy diet and regular exercise. Review your sleeping patterns and change habits that are not allowing you to achieve regular, restful sleep.

DEVELOP A CONSISTENT ROUTINE

As much as possible keep your time for going to bed and getting up to a similar time each day as this helps to develop a consistent pattern. Get into a bedtime routine so that going to sleep becomes part of that routine. Go to bed when you are ready for sleep so that you associate going to bed with falling asleep. Try staying awake all day. Taking naps during the day often makes it harder to sleep at night, as you may need less sleep.

EXERCISE

Regular exercise increases your sense of wellbeing and also helps you to feel physically tired. The best time to exercise is late afternoon or early evening as exercising too close to bed can result in difficulty getting off to sleep.

RELAXATION

Do something relaxing each day. Wind down during the second half of the evening before going to bed. Read a book, take a bath or listen to music. Discover what is relaxing for you. Having a wind down routine is one of the most effective

strategies for having a good night's sleep.

AVOID STIMULANTS

Avoid caffeine after your evening meal as it is designed to keep you awake. Caffeine is in coffee, tea, coke, pepsi, chocolate and some energy drinks. Avoid taking cold remedies with pseudoephedrine within four hours of bedtime, as it is a stimulant that can keep you awake.

FOOD AND ALCOHOL

Alcohol should be avoided before going to bed. It might help you to fall asleep but the sleep is often poor quality and you may wake up a few hours later. Eat meals 2-3 hours before going to bed to avoid sleeping on a full stomach or waking up hungry in the middle of the night.

LIMIT THINKING AND WORRYING

Limit the amount of thinking you do in bed. Do your worrying and problem solving during the day. It can be helpful to write down before bedtime the issues and events that need to be attended to. Reassure yourself about your capacity to solve whatever is concerning you. Try and switch your attention to anything that represents relaxation. Think of a pleasant time in the past or a relaxing place that you have enjoyed visiting. Focus on a pleasant experience, try daydreaming or focus on your breathing. Avoid arguments, work or study before bedtime.

BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

Make sure your room is as quiet as possible, well ventilated and warm without being overheated. Have a comfortable



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mattress and pillow. Move the clock out of sight so that you do not clock watch. If you suspect that there may be physical reasons for poor sleep, discuss this with your GP.

IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING

Try to keep your eyes open in the darkened room and resist closing your eyes for just another few seconds. This usually tempts sleep to take over. If you are finding it difficult to stop thinking and worrying, say to yourself "I'll think about that tomorrow." If you are not asleep after 30 minutes, get up and go into another room and do something quiet or relaxing for example read or listen to music. Continue this until you feel the next wave of sleepiness then return to bed.

Do not try too hard to fall asleep. Let sleep come by itself and don't worry about not sleeping, as this will not help you to get more sleep. Tell yourself that you'll be tired tomorrow but you'll make it through the day. Even if you are not sleeping, lying in bed and resting is nearly as good as sleep.

If you suspect that there may be physical reasons for poor sleep, discuss this with your GP.

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