

Principles for Promoting a Good Sleep Pattern

- Build a “wind down” positive and enjoyable routine for the 2 - 4 hours before bedtime.
- In this time, ideally after 6pm, avoid caffeine (coffee, tea etc) and high levels of sugar. Choose warm drinks made with milk, such as Milo.
- Close to bedtime, take a long warm bath or shower and try to use relaxing aromas such as lavender or chamomile in products, rather than stimulating aromas such as citrus.
- Environment can have a powerful effect on sleep. Try to keep your bedroom a place of calm and relaxation. Avoid or eliminate anything that you find disturbing at night, such as excessive or chronic low level noise, unpleasant temperatures or the room being too light or too dark for your preference. For many young people their bedroom may be the only space in the house that they have that they feel is “theirs”. Create a work space in your room and a relax/sleep space and keep your relax/sleep space a “no stress” and no work zone.
- Avoid thinking of problems or doing any chores or schoolwork during this “wind down” time.
- Avoid computer-based (PC, laptop, games console, smart phones etc) activities for at least 2hrs, ideally 4hrs, before going to bed, especially if screens are sharp and bright. These can affect brain activity / stimulate your brain for hours after you have stopped using them.
- Some people find television or reading helpful during “wind down”, while other people don't. Try to avoid anything that involves excitement and stimulation (such as anything new). An old favourite movie, TV series or book is often helpful. Try to keep it positive and light.
- As you get into bed consider - Deep Breathing (breathe in for 4-5 seconds and then breathe out for 4-5 seconds), Muscle Relaxation (go ‘floppy’ from head to toe) and Positive Visualisation (go to a ‘happy place’ such as the beach or any place you feel calm and good). See The TOOLBOX for more details.
- Keep a positive thinking rule during this “wind down” time (think of good things of the day or your favourite things) is important. Some people write it down – a gratitude journal.
- Develop a **regular sleep routine** in terms of time. Decide on a reasonable time to go to bed and a reasonable time to get up, allowing enough time to get a good night's sleep. Most young people need at least 8 hours of sleep a night. Try to keep to this routine, even if you don't feel tired, if you feel that haven't slept enough, and even during weekends and holidays. This will help to “train” your body and mind to go to sleep and to wake up at certain times.
- **Absolutely always avoid daytime sleeping.** A nap during the day can be very tempting when you haven't slept well during the night, but this can confuse your body and mind. This is the most important strategy of managing insomnia along with having a routine.
- Regular daily physical exercise is very helpful. Avoid exercise during “wind down”.
- Keep a note pad next to your bed and if you are struggling to sleep and worrying about things, write your thoughts down briefly (just a word or two) and let it go. Picture a bird snatching your worries and flying out of the window. Look at it the next day and make a plan with someone who can help you to conquer or manage your worries.
- The “20 minute rule” is often helpful. If you lie awake in bed for long, take a 20 minute break from trying to sleep by going to a different room and doing something else (reading, writing, anything calming and relaxing – avoid electronics). Negotiate this rule with your family.