

Sleep Hygiene Tips

1. *Get regular sleep.* One of the best ways to train your body to sleep well is to go to bed and get up around the same time every day, even on weekends and days off.
2. *Sleep when sleepy.* Only try to sleep when you actually feel tired or sleepy, rather than spending too much time in bed.
3. *Get up & try again.* If you haven't been able to sleep after about 20 minutes, get up and do something calming and boring until you feel sleepy, then return to bed. Avoid doing anything that is too stimulating or involves exposure to too much light, as this will wake you up even more.
4. *Avoid caffeine & nicotine.* It's best to avoid consuming any caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, soda, chocolate, some medications) or nicotine for at least 4-6 hours before sleep, since these substances act as stimulants.
5. *Avoid alcohol.* It's also best to avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before sleep. Many people may feel that alcohol helps them to relax and get to sleep at first, but it actually interrupts the quality of sleep.
6. *Avoid exercise.* Exercising on a regular basis is a great habit to get into and can even help people fall asleep faster and spend more time in deep sleep. Engaging in high-intensity exercise within 90 minutes of your bedtime, however, may make it harder for you to fall asleep.
7. *Bed is for sleeping.* Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep. Watching TV in bed, eating in bed, or reading in bed can interfere with this association.
8. *No naps.* It's best to avoid taking naps during the day to make sure you're tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it's for less than an hour and before 3pm.
9. *Sleep rituals.* You can develop your own rituals to remind your body that it's time to sleep. Some people find it useful to do relaxing stretches or breathing exercises for 15 minutes before bed each night, or sit calmly with a cup of caffeine-free tea.
10. *Bath time.* Having a hot bath 1-2 hours before bedtime can be useful, as it will raise your body temperature and cause you to feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again.
11. *No clock-watching.* Frequently checking your clock throughout the night can wake you up, especially if you turn on the light to read the time. It also reinforces negative thoughts such as, "It's so late, I'll never get to sleep."
12. *Use a sleep diary.* Keeping track of your sleeping habits can be helpful in identifying factors that may contribute to difficulties. Because keeping a diary will likely involve clock-watching to some extent, it is a good idea to only use it for two weeks to get an idea of your sleep patterns. Then, you can use it again in two months to see how your sleep has progressed.
13. *Eat right.* A healthy, balanced diet will help you sleep well, but timing is important. Some people find an empty stomach at bed time distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack. But, a heavy meal before bed can interrupt sleep. You can also drink a warm glass of milk which contains tryptophan, a natural sleep inducer.
14. *The right space.* It's important that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. This includes having a mattress and pillows that are in good shape, sleeping in a cooler room with enough blankets to stay warm, and using an eye mask or curtains can be helpful for blocking out light. Additionally, reducing noise pollution by using a fan, air conditioner, or white noise machine can help you drown out sounds that may keep you awake.
15. *Keep daytime routine the same.* Even if you have a bad night's sleep and feel tired, it's important to keep daytime activities as planned. Not doing so can reinforce insomnia.
16. *Implement an electronics curfew.* It's best to avoid using back-lit electronic devices for 30 to 60 minutes before bed. The artificial light can interrupt the sleep cycle and affect your body's production of melatonin.
17. *Let go of worries.* To reduce anxious thoughts that are interfering with sleep, try scheduling "worry time" earlier in the day as a designated time for you to think each day. Alternatively, some people find journaling to be a helpful practice for letting go of their worries. Other strategies include meditating, deep breathing, focusing your mind on the sensations you feel in your body instead of the thoughts coming up, and reminding yourself that worries in the middle of the night are "middle-of-the-night-thinking" and in the morning you will think and feel differently.