

The good sleep guide

Good quality sleep is essential for good mental health. A quiet mind and a relaxed body will help you fall asleep. It takes effort and practice to improve sleep.

Routine

A regular sleep and wake time is key so stick to a schedule, even at weekends. Even if you have a bad night's sleep it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities as planned. Avoiding activities because you feel tired can reinforce insomnia.

Ensure you exercise at least 30 minutes daily, in the morning or afternoon. Only consider gentle stretching or yoga in the evening.

It is best not to nap for longer than 20 minutes, and never after 5pm to ensure you are tired at bedtime.

If you find it difficult to fall asleep, get up after about 20 minutes, leave the bedroom and do something calming such as reading, listening to music or yoga, before going back to bed.

Frequently checking the clock can wake you up and reinforce negative thoughts ensure you turn it away from you

Rituals

End screen time one hour before scheduled sleep.

Develop rituals to remind your body it is time to rest: keep lights low for half an hour or so before bedtime, read a book, use aromatherapy, listen to calming music or a relaxing audiobook.

Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep.

Environment

Make your bedroom as dark and as quiet as possible.

You will sleep better if your bedroom is between 15°C and 19°C. However, cold extremities will prevent sleep onset; artificially warming up the feet tends to make us feel sleepy.

Diet

An empty stomach at bedtime is distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack, but a heavy meal soon before bed can interrupt sleep.

It is best to avoid consuming stimulants (coffee, tea, cola drinks or chocolate) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed.

Many people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps them to get to sleep at first, but it actually interrupts the quality of sleep.

Nicotine does not have any sedative effects, it just appears like that because of nicotine withdrawal symptoms. In fact, non smokers get an average 20% more sleep per night.

Relaxation

There is a tendency to overmonitor sleep, which can make matters worse by creating a vicious cycle of monitoring-worry-stress-poor sleep.

Negative thoughts about sleep (assuming the worst, blaming everything on lack of sleep, unrealistic expectations, unhelpful thinking styles) can play an important role in maintaining sleep problems.

A state of mental hyperarousal (worry, anxiety) is a key factor behind insomnia. If your brain registers a threat (even if that threat is generated by your own mind) then you won't sleep until your brain registers the environment as safe. Resolve this before going to bed by talking, writing a journal or creating a to-do-list so that you can put any worries aside for night time.