

Good Sleep Hygiene

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1. Same bedtime and wake time every day within a half hour of the previous day.

The number one culprit of non-restorative sleep is because of a delay in getting to bed. Losing just 30 minutes per day of sleep will result in an estimated weight gain of 10lbs. This is due to stress, cortisol, and the cumulative effect on the metabolism of the body.

2. Sleep in a dark, quiet, and cool room.

The body does not regulate its temperature as well as it does while we are awake. So, make sure your bed sheets keep your body at the desired temperature all night. Light is the number one way to wake up your brain and some are more sensitive than others. Do what you need to do to block it out. Sound is important to women, healthcare workers, and people who have experienced trauma. Sound is their cue to act. So, noise machines, guided meditations, etc are fabulous options to keep their brains from looking for that cue. Ear plugs do not typically work as well because it goes against their nature of being available in an emergency.

3. Share your habits with your pets.

Animals follow our lead. Allow them to settle and have their own undisturbed sleep during the night so that they won't wake and disturb you.

4. Stop fluid intake 2 hours before bed.

Even decaf tea has caffeine in it. It's just below a threshold to be classified as such. If you're sensitive, it will have you wired or up using the loo during the first half of the night. If you are restricting fluids this way and finding you are still up frequently at night to urinate, go see your doctor. Frequent urination is a sign of body stress and there are many causes.

5. Stop sugar and caffeine intake by noon.

It takes an average of 12 hours to eliminate caffeine from your system. If you are prone to insomnia, this is a major factor and you might want to consider how often you take in caffeine. Sugar also leads to restlessness as the body tries to recruit insulin and regulate blood sugar levels at a time when it should be resting.

6. Get adequate, regular exercise.

The idea behind this is both physical and mental. The physical piece lends to overall proper body function. We generate energy at night and then we spend it during the day. Doing one without the other lends to body imbalance overall. Mental effects of physical activity are well known in regard to stress management and hormone balance.

7. Avoid stressful T.V. programs, music (think heavy metal), and conversations with people prior to bed.

Focus on what you would like to dream about. The theme you take in prior to bed will set the tone of your sleep as it is the first to drop straight into your subconscious. Think of your subconscious like a good soup. What flavor do you want it to have? Sometimes we can't avoid these negative experiences prior to bed and often people will toss and turn with those same feelings all night long. This is because their focus was on the outcome of the argument and all those negative emotions and possibilities. Let your subconscious do it's job and take your hands off the controls. Let go of the problem, and hold the idea in your mind, prior to falling asleep, that your subconscious can work out the perfect solution for you all on it's own. Give it a whirl. At worst, you had a good night sleep and, in the morning, you now have the capacity to think clearly.

8. Avoid bright lights in the hour or two leading to bed.

The brain secretes Melatonin only in the absence of light. Melatonin pressures the brain to sleep. It is the body's perfect sleeping pill. Take advantage of it!

9. Bed is for sleeping and sex. Not eating, gaming, or watching T.V.

Train your body to expect that your bed is your opportunity to disengage from the world and re-engage with yourself and your loved one. Rest, peace, relaxation. Engaging in activities other than sleep or sex in bed is robbing you of your most important relationships.

10. If your sleep is nonrestorative and you are doing all of the above, seek help.

Sleep is a major factor in how our physical and mental health operates. When it is poor in quality and quantity, it is a sign that something is out of balance in one or both of those realms. You know your body better than anyone. If you think it's a physical condition (like pain), start with your

doctor. If you think it is a mental cause (like an overactive mind) start with a mental health professional that fits with your comfort level. Don't wait!