

SLEEP HYGIENE

Good sleep habits are important in maintaining a feeling of well-being. Sleep, like food and water, is a basic human necessity required in order for us to stay healthy. Often times, however, because of our busy lifestyle, these basic needs are not adequately met. While it is possible to satisfy our hunger and thirst by eating and drinking “on the run,” it is difficult to function normally when sleep quantity and/or quality is compromised. When this occurs, we may experience problems such as difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, as well as experiencing fatigue, uneasiness, and daytime sleepiness. In order to achieve an improved sense of well-being, below are some general guidelines on proper sleep hygiene.

1. Allow yourself to get enough sleep. Although the quantity of sleep may vary among individuals, most adults require 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night.
2. Keep regular bedtime and awakening times. Changing your bedtime or awakening time by more than 1 - 1½ hours may adversely affect your feeling of well being. Our body has an “internal clock” which regulates our sleep-wake pattern. This internal clock tries to remain in synchrony with the cues from the environment we live in, such as daylight and darkness, meals, and even sounds such as the much dreaded alarm clock. By keeping a consistent sleep schedule, going to bed and awakening at about the same time each day, we adjust our internal clock to match our daily schedule. This allows us to fall asleep and awaken at more desired times.
3. Limit naps. Long naps during the day may result in difficulty falling asleep at night as well as difficulty staying asleep. Naps are very beneficial, but they should be limited to less than 30 minutes in duration.
4. Exercise regularly. The best time to exercise is in the morning or early afternoon. If you choose to exercise in the evening, avoid strenuous exercise for at least 6 hours before bedtime.
5. Do not eat or drink heavily for 3 hours before bedtime. In addition to potentially contributing to heartburn, eating before bedtime may result in difficulty falling asleep. If hungry, however, a light snack may help you fall asleep.
6. Use the bedroom only for sleep or sex. Avoid other activities, such as watching TV in bed, or performing work or exercise, which may prevent you from relaxing prior to bedtime.
7. Assure a quiet peaceful environment for sleep. A place to sleep must be quiet, dark, and not too cool or too warm. Choose the firmness of the mattress and pillows of your liking. Repair noisy heating or air conditioning systems, avoid bedrooms near car or train traffic, sleep separate from a loud snoring or restless bed partner and remove ticking clocks. You should not fall asleep with a television or radio turned on. You may consider placing white noise in your room such as a quiet fan or a fish aquarium.

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8. Avoid or limit caffeine. Beverages containing caffeine (coffee, tea, hot chocolate, cola beverages) should be limited to no more than 3 cups per day and not taken 6 hours before bedtime. These products may prevent you from falling asleep and from staying asleep.
9. Avoid alcohol before bedtime. Although it may initially help you fall asleep, alcohol typically causes early awakenings and difficulty going back to sleep.
10. Avoid smoking for at least three hours before sleep. The nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant that may result in difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. Although the best recommendation is to quit smoking altogether, you should at least not smoke near bedtime.
11. Learn to wind down a few hours prior to sleep. Stress and worry prevent you from becoming relaxed enough to fall asleep. Avoid worrying about daily problems prior to sleep. Set aside time during the day to deal with these worrisome thoughts. Avoid reading job-related materials before bedtime. Do not plan your next day when attempting to fall asleep. Concentrate on relaxing, pleasant thoughts or of peaceful imagery. Bedtime rituals such as reading an enjoyable book, taking a warm bath or listening to soft music can be helpful.