

Keys to Healthy Sleep Hygiene

First of all, try to get rid of all worries about not getting enough sleep. Your body can function with less sleep, but you will be tired.

Keep regular sleep habits!

Try to have same bedtime and same wake time every day

Go to bed prepared to sleep!

Avoid vigorous exercise shortly before retiring. It may impede your ability to fall asleep. At the same time, exercise at least several hours before retiring has been shown to be helpful.

Avoid late afternoon/evening naps, and do not allow yourself to doze off while reading or watching television prior to bedtime. Even brief episodes of sleep may interfere with subsequent sleep.

Do not allow yourself to lie in bed worrying about problems or challenges of the upcoming day. If necessary, set aside a 'worry time' some hours before bedtime and tell yourself that any difficulties you cannot resolve during that allotted time can be put on until the next day.

In most cases, the bed should be used for sleep--and not for reading of interesting materials, watching television, working on a laptop, or other activities that may keep one awake. Learn to associate your bed with relaxation and not with activities that will be likely to keep you alert for prolonged periods.

Avoid large meals and excessive fluid intake that may provoke poor sleep, indigestion, heartburn or frequent awakenings to urinate. Any bedtime snacks should be small and consist of non-spicy foods with sedating potential. Examples include peanut butter and dairy products (both are high in tryptophan, an amino acid or "building block of proteins" that tends to increase sleepiness). Many patients also report that apples taken before bedtime increase their sleepiness and ability to doze off promptly.

Caffeine and smoking prior to retiring are additional factors that can worsen one's ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Warm baths (not showers) prior to bedtime truly can prove helpful!--as can engaging in relaxing, calming and soothing activities.

Tranquil music composed for sleep induction, waterfalls and light/sound/aromatherapy units often are used effectively to facilitate dozing off into natural sleep.

Make sure that your bedroom is conducive to good sleep!

Ensure a dark environment, unless you are reassured by having a night light in the room.

Ensure a quiet environment--or, if it works better for you, a soft, low-level noise such as a fan. Use measures to block out outside sounds, or utilize either white noise generators or earplugs that are 'waxy" and capable of being molded to fit the ear canal.

Ensure a reasonably cool environment. Overly warm bedrooms are not conducive to quality sleep. Ensure a comfortable environment. Be sure that your mattress is adequately firm and comfortable. The same comfort considerations will also apply to your pillow.

If you have allergies to dust, dust mites, and other common features of a typical bedroom, take steps to create a relatively allergen-free bedroom. Frequently helpful measures include replacement of old pillows and carpeting, cleaning of ductwork and furnace filters, use of a HEPA filter/air conditioning and keeping pets out of the bedroom if possible and appropriate.

Don't sleep too long!

Avoid oversleeping and lying in the bed for prolonged periods after your sleep is completed. Excessive sleep tends to be fragmented, unrefreshing sleep that leaves people feeling worse- and that may then interfere with the following night of sleep. Some individuals require nine hours of sleep, but in adults, longer requirements in the absence of illnesses are unusual. Naps may be beneficial--but for people on a normal day schedule, they are best taken in the early afternoon, and in most cases, should be restricted to less than one hour.

What if you can't get to sleep or return to sleep?

Realize that frustration and 'trying harder' to fall asleep can be enough to keep anyone awake! The harder one tries, the more elusive sleep becomes. Not caring whether sleep will occur can facilitate its onset. Tell yourself that transient inability to fall asleep should not be frightening, since your body will undoubtedly allow you to fall asleep before lack of sleep would ever become a serious threat to your health.

At such times, don't engage in activities that will render sleep unlikely or impossible! Don't go shopping, do laundry, clean house, read an interesting book or play computer games Do something relaxing to the point of becoming lethargic when you do it. If you find it tedious to read Shakespeare, buy The Merchant of Venice!

In short, distract yourself from thinking about your inability to sleep (or any other stresses in your life) Focus instead on things so inherently boring that you probably won't be able to stay awake long enough to think about them for any significant period of time.

If you eat a snack at such times, ensure that it is light and contains foods that will promote sleep without causing unwanted weight gain. If you like peanut butter sandwiches and they agree with you, now would be the time to eat one.