



10 TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHT SLEEP

Many things can impair your sleep, from stress to depression to simple changes in your everyday routine. If you think you might be missing a good night's sleep, here are some basics to try right away.

1. Relax & reduce stress. Allow time for your mind (and body!) to wind down. You might try a relaxing activity, such as taking a hot bath, getting a massage, or listening to soothing music.
2. Don't try too hard! If you are having trouble sleeping, don't allow yourself to get frustrated. Focusing on NOT sleeping can sometimes increase anxiety and make it worse! Many experts suggest getting out of bed, turning on the light, and engaging in a quiet activity, such as reading, watching TV, or listening to music. Do these things until you find yourself fighting off sleep, then return to bed? If you still feel awake & alert, get back up again.
3. Sleep for as long as your body needs - no more, no less. The amount of sleep you need to rest and restore your mind and body might be different than anyone else you know. To determine how much sleep you need, observe how much it takes for you to feel rested and alert during the following day.
4. Follow a regular sleep and wake time - even on the weekends! People are creatures of habit, and our bodies like rhythm in our activities. Even if you stay up late or have trouble sleeping at night, waking up at the same time regardless can help your body get back into a healthy sleep pattern. Avoid getting a "Monday morning hangover." This is often experienced by people who completely alter their weekend sleep schedule by staying up late and sleeping in. Then, when you get up early Monday morning, your sleep rhythm is totally off!
5. Avoid caffeine (or at least, reduce your intake). Caffeine can make it harder to get to sleep; cause you to awaken during the night, and to lower the quality of sleep, even in people who aren't aware of it. People have varying levels of sensitivity to these substances. Some folks have been found to still have effects from caffeine from coffee or a chocolate bar some eight hours later.
6. Avoid alcohol. Many people believe that drinking alcoholic beverages will help them sleep. Although it can help you to relax, it actually contributes to poor sleep by causing frequent awakenings. Chronic alcohol abuse increases stage 1 sleep - which is the lightest and least productive form of sleep - and it decreases REM sleep. Thus,

the quality of sleep is diminished. This phenomenon can exist for several months after the individual has stopped drinking.

7. Quit smoking. Nicotine is a stimulant. Studies have shown that people who smoke cigarettes have more difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. Cigarettes can raise blood pressure, increase the heart rate and stimulate brain-wave activity. And, don't forget the fire hazards of smoking in bed!
8. Watch what you eat & when you eat it. Although eating a large meal might make you feel tired, trying to sleep shortly after might be troublesome, as your body works hard to digest the food. On the other hand, going to bed hungry is not good either. Make your evening meal light, and include protein in it to avoid hunger later. If you snack before going to bed, do so about two hours before. Whole-grain carbohydrates and warm milk are common recommendations. Also, avoid snacks that increase your chance of indigestion or heartburn, such as fatty foods or those high in garlic or spices.
9. Exercise regularly - and at the right time. Regular exercise can help you to sleep more easily and to increase the quality of sleep over time. However, "one-shot" or sporadic exercise is not likely to have the same effect. Exercise in the late afternoon or early evening is more effective at improving sleep than that performed in the morning or late evening.
10. Check your room for "bed bugs." These are "bugs" in and around your room that will make it more difficult to get to sleep or stay asleep. Do loud noises occur during the Night? Do lights shine in your windows, or through the door? Is the room excessively warm? Do children or pets disturb your sleep in the middle of the night? These are the type of environmental factors that often can be changed. For example, you could wear a mask to shield light or hang more opaque window coverings, and limit nighttime "visitors."

A problem that many people face - especially those who are "light sleepers" - is disturbance from bed partners. If your bed partner has insomnia, is a restless sleeper, snores or has similar behaviors, the effects on your sleep might need to be addressed. These may be signs that your partner could benefit from better sleep hygiene and, possibly, a visit with a health care practitioner to explore possible underlying problems, such as sleep apnea. Discussing these issues with your partner can help prevent resentment and lead to possible solutions. For example, some people find that sleeping in separate beds or rooms can improve their sleep and their relationships. (This option should definitely be discussed before trying!)

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