

SLEEP HYGIENE

Strategies

Sleep hygiene is “a variety of different practices and habits that are necessary to have good nighttime sleep quality and full daytime alertness,” as defined by the National Sleep Foundation. Listed below are a few recommendations to achieving healthy sleep hygiene and getting a good night’s rest.

1. **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day (yes, that includes the weekends) to help regulate your body's internal clock.
2. **Establish a regular, relaxing sleep routine.** A relaxing routine leading up to bedtime helps establish sleep time from your typical daytime activities that symbolize “awakeness”. A regular nighttime routine helps the body recognize that it is time for sleep. Relaxing wind down activities may include taking warm shower or bath, reading a light book, or easy stretching. Try to avoid activities that heighten emotions or are energy-stimulating before attempting to sleep.
3. **Wind down.** Allow yourself sufficient time to transition into sleep mode. Try spending the last hour or so before bed doing a calming, relaxing activities. Using an electronic devices that emit blue light (such as a cell phone, tablet, laptop, or tv) can make it hard to fall asleep, as this type of lighting simulates sunlight and may be activating to the brain. Avoid electronics before bed or in the middle of the night. Invest in an alarm clock to avoid the temptation of having your phone bedside!
4. **Take a hot bath or shower before bed.** Not only are baths and showers relaxing, but the vasodilation (aka expansion) of blood vessels causes a drop in body temperature, which is ideal for falling asleep.
5. **Avoid napping.** Napping will not make up for your sleep debt and may interrupt your natural sleep cycle. While you may want to avoid naps altogether, power napping may give you a burst of energy during the day, improving mood, alertness, and performance. However, to decrease risk for poor nighttime sleep, avoid taking naps after 3PM and limit them to 30 minutes.
6. **Exercise daily.** Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no activity. As little as 10 minutes of aerobic exercise, such as walking or cycling, can improve sleep quality. Some people find that intense exercise right before sleep disrupts their ability to fall asleep, so you may want to keep your workouts to 2+ hours before bedtime.
7. **Create a pleasant sleep environment.** Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep. Your bedroom should be cool – generally between 60 and 72 degrees but is highly variable from person to person. Your bedroom should also be free from any noise or light that can disturb your sleep (this includes a bed partner's sleep disruptions such as snoring). Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise" machines, humidifiers, fans, etc.
8. **Use light to help manage your circadian rhythms.** Avoid bright lights and electronic devices in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning/daytime to keep your circadian rhythms in sync with the natural rise and fall of the sun.

9. **Avoid caffeine and nicotine.** The stimulating effects of nicotine and caffeine (found in coffee, sodas, teas, and even chocolate) can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully. Consider cutting it off in the early afternoon to avoid its disruption on sleep.
10. **Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed.** A "nightcap" might seemingly help you fall sleep, but alcohol will keep you in the "light" stages of sleep, not allowing you to get a quality night's rest. As the sedating effects wear off, you may find yourself waking up in the middle of the night.
11. **Avoid food and beverages that can be disruptive right before sleep.** A large meal can cause indigestion and discomfort that interferes with sleep. Avoid eating large meals for two to three hours before bedtime, but also avoid going to sleep hungry. You may want to try a light snack 45 minutes before bed. If possible, limit heavy, rich, fatty, fried, spicy, or citrus foods close to bedtime, as these may cause indigestion. Drinking too much liquid before bed can also be disruptive if you're having to get in the middle of the night!
12. **Avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep, if possible.** Some heart, blood pressure, or asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter herbal remedies can disrupt sleep patterns. Consult with your doctor to see if your medications might be affecting your sleep and if you can modify your intake time.
13. **Use your bed only for sleep and sex.** This will strengthen the association your mind makes between your bed and sleep. If you associate a particular activity or item with stress or anxiety, remove it from your bedtime routine and leave it out of the bedroom if possible.
14. **Don't lie in bed awake.** If you find yourself awake after lying in bed for more than 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity outside of the bedroom until you feel sleepy.
15. **See a doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping.** If you consistently find yourself feeling tired or not well rested during the day despite spending enough time in bed at night, you may have a sleep disorder. Your family doctor or a sleep specialist should be able to help you. You may also benefit from recording your sleep in a log to help you identify common patterns you experience with your sleep.

All recommendations are adapted from the following sources:

<http://www.medicinenet.com/sleep/page3.htm>

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/sleep-hygiene>

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-tools-tips/healthy-sleep-tips>