

Twelve Tips for Healthy Sleep

1) Stick to a sleep schedule

Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. If there is only 1 tip you heed, this should be it.

2) Exercise is great, but not too late in the day

Try to move your body at least 30 minutes on most days but not later than 2-3 hours before bedtime.

3) Avoid caffeine and nicotine.

Coffee, colas, some teas, and chocolate contain caffeine—a stimulant that can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully. A cup of coffee late in the afternoon can make it hard to fall asleep at night.

Nicotine is also a stimulant, often causing smokers to sleep very lightly. Smokers also tend to wake up too early in the morning because of nicotine withdrawal.

4) Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed.

Having a nightcap or alcoholic beverage before sleep may help you relax, but regular use robs you of REM sleep which is particularly restorative. Many studies have found that those who drink alcohol before sleep wake up in the middle of the night when the effects of alcohol have worn off.

5) Avoid large meals and beverages late at night.

A light snack is okay but a large meal can cause indigestion, which interferes with sleep. Drinking too many fluids at night can cause frequent awakenings to urinate.

6) If possible, avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep.

Some commonly-prescribed heart, blood pressure or asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter and herbal remedies for coughs, colds or allergies, can disrupt sleep patterns. If you have trouble sleeping, ask your pharmacist whether any drugs you're taking may be contributing to your insomnia and whether they can be taken at earlier in the day or evening.

7) Be careful about taking naps after 3 p.m.

Naps can help make up for lost sleep, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

8) Relax before bedtime.

Avoid overscheduling your day so that no time is left for unwinding. A relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, should be part of your bedtime ritual.

9) Take a hot bath before bed.

The drop in body temperature after getting out of the bath may help you feel sleepy, and the bath can help you relax and slow down so you're more ready to sleep.

10) Make your bedroom cool, dark and gadget-free.

You sleep better if the room temperature is kept cooler. A TV, cell phone or computer in the bedroom can be a distraction and the blue light they emit can hinder your body's production of melatonin.

11) Have the right sunlight exposure.

Daylight is the key to regulating sleep patterns. Try to get outside in natural light soon after you wake up in the morning, and at least 30 minutes each day. Sleep experts recommend that, if you have problems falling asleep, you should get an hour of exposure to morning sunlight and dim the lights as bedtime approaches.

12) Don't lie in bed awake.

If you find yourself still awake after staying in bed more than 20 minutes, or if you are starting to feel anxious or worried, get up and do some relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. Avoid screens if you get up and instead reach for a book to read or do some journaling.

Wellness for you ... for life!

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