

Tips to improve your sleep

Helpful Thinking

Once you start worrying about not getting enough sleep or how you will function the next day, sleep problems may only get worse. It is important to watch out for thoughts that can interfere with sleep. For example:

"If I don't get enough hours sleep I won't be able to do anything the next day."

"Poor sleep is having a serious effect on my physical health."

More helping thinking:

- Ask yourself what has really happened after a bad night's sleep in the past. Have the things you fear will happen always come true? Or have you been able to manage the day?
- Compare how tired you have felt on days where you were busy and not paying attention to your tiredness versus days you paid a lot of attention to tiredness.
- Consider the pros and cons of worrying about sleep.
- Consider the pros and cons of different ways you have tried to help yourself sleep.

Relaxation

- Use deep or slow breathing or muscle relaxation to calm your mind and body and focus your thoughts away from worries and concerns.

Sleep Behaviors

Establish a regular waking time

- A regular sleep-wake pattern is very important, especially waking up at the same time each morning. The time that you wake helps to set all of your body's rhythms.
- In fact, you should try not to vary the time of day that you get up by more than one hour, even on weekends.

Allow a wind-down time prior to sleep

- Make sure that you stop work and activity at least 30 minutes before you go to bed and do something different and non-stressful, such as reading or listening to music.

Have a routine

- Make a routine before going to bed such as brushing your teeth, turning off the lights and so forth, in a particular order. If you do this each night it will become a signal for your body that it is time to go to bed.

Use your bed only for sleep

- Your bedroom should only be used for sleep, and of course sexual activity (which may help you to sleep).
- Activities such as eating, working, watching television, reading, drinking, arguing, or discussing the day's problems should be done elsewhere. These activities may make you too "revved up" to allow you to sleep and make you associate your bed with alertness rather than sleep.
- It may be useful to remove all objects in your bedroom that are not related to sleep, such as your phone.

Do not stay in bed when you are not asleep

- Only go to bed when you are sleepy. If you do not fall asleep in about 20 minutes, get up and go to another room. Stay up until sleepy and only then return to your bed to sleep. If you return to bed and still cannot sleep, repeat as often as needed.
- If you find yourself unable to stop worrying about things when you are in bed, get up and do something that is distracting yet relaxing, like knitting, listening to music, reading a book or slow breathing. Do not return to bed until you feel sleepy again.
- When you do go back to bed, if you find that you are still worried and sleepless, get out of bed again and repeat as often as needed. You need to train your body that your bed is only associated with sleep (and not worry).
- No matter how tired you are during the day, try to avoid daytime naps (unless you are doing shift work).

Avoid caffeine

- This drug is found in coffee, tea, cocoa, cola drinks, as well as some over the counter medications. Having caffeine before bedtime, or drinking too much caffeine during the day, will increase feelings of energy and wakefulness and make it more difficult for you to fall asleep.

- For most people, caffeine has an effect for 6 hours. So if you go to bed at 10 p.m., you should not have caffeine after 4 p.m.

Avoid nicotine

- Nicotine stimulates the nervous system by releasing a hormone called adrenaline. Adrenaline acts to arouse the body and mind, making you alert.

Avoid excessive alcohol

- Although alcohol can be relaxing, having several drinks in the evening causes you to get much poorer sleep overall. As the alcohol in your system is broken down by your body, you tend to wake more often and spend less time in the deeper stages of sleep.
- If you drink regularly you may find that you come to depend on the alcohol to reduce your anxiety and help you get to sleep. Not only will alcohol leave you feeling still tired the next morning (because you do not get the better quality sleep), but you are likely to have anxiety when you wake up, which could last throughout the day and make it even more difficult to sleep at night.

Avoid sleeping pills

- Using sleeping pills (sedative hypnotics) for any length of time causes as many problems as it solves. While these drugs will help you fall asleep and will decrease your anxiety in the short term, these benefits will disappear in the long term if you continue to use them regularly.

Don't exercise before going to bed

- Avoid exercise in the 3 hours before you go to bed, otherwise you may still be too aroused following the exercise to be able to fall asleep.

Create a Personal Plan:

Which ones of these steps can you put into place in the next week?

Which ones of these steps would you like to try in the next month?

