

Sleep Hygiene

1. Never try to sleep. It only makes things worse. If you feel anxious in bed, get up. If you don't fall asleep within 30 minutes, get up. Get a drink of water, go to the bathroom, do a relaxation technique or read a book. When you start to feel sleepy, then go back to bed.
2. Put yourself on a schedule where you get up and go to bed at the same time each day. Also, restrict your time in bed to no more than 1 hour longer than the actual time you sleep.
3. Use relaxation techniques to reduce your stress level during the day. This will make it easier to unwind when it's time to relax and go to sleep.
4. Caffeine is a stimulant and should be discontinued 8 hours before bedtime. Also, try switching to decaffeinated during the day.
5. Nicotine is also a stimulant and should be avoided near bedtime and upon night wakening. Instead, try a relaxing cup of herbal tea or warm milk.
6. Alcohol is a depressant; although it may facilitate sleep onset, it causes awakenings later in the night.
7. A light snack may be sleep-inducing, but a heavy meal too close to bedtime interferes with sleep. A light carbohydrate snacks can help increase the production of serotonin in the brain, which in turn helps to bring on sleep. Also, avoid eating foods with high sugar content to close to bedtime. If you minimize fluid intake the last few hours before bedtime, you will lesson the likelihood of waking up from a full bladder.
8. Do not exercise vigorously within 3-4 hours of bedtime; regular exercise in the late morning or early afternoon may deepen sleep.

9. Minimize noise, light and excessive temperature during the sleep period with earplugs, or an electric blanket/air conditioner.

10. Avoid watching violent TV shows, movies or the news within the few hours before going to bed. Try doing a relaxation exercise, reading a good book, or listening to relaxing music.

11. Use the bed for sleeping. Don't watch TV or do work in bed. Make it a place associated with sleep and relaxation.

12. Avoid taking extended naps during the day. Instead, try taking a 30-minute power nap or doing a relaxation exercise. Taking longer naps during the day may impede your ability to sleep at night.

13. Use the last two hours before bedtime as a time to relax. Take time earlier in the evening to plan your next day's activities, make phone calls and conduct personal business.

14. Remember that by eating carbohydrates you can increase the production of serotonin in the brain. (Refer to the separate sheet on serotonin.)

15. Watch your expectations:
 - Not everyone needs 8 hours of sleep per night.
 - Most of the night is not spent in deep sleep.
 - Moderate sleep loss has no effect on performance the next day.

16. In most cases, medication is not the answer to insomnia. Always check with your physician before starting, stopping or altering your medication. Sleep disturbances may sometimes be a symptom of something else. Be sure to check with your physician if you have experienced changes in your sleep pattern. Examine your stress level and lifestyle to see if you need to make changes that will improve your sleep.