

What You Can Do to Sleep Better

Make new habits for sleeping rather than simply breaking old ones. You may want to start by keeping a sleep diary to help you understand your sleep patterns and habits.

Follow these simple sleep guidelines to help you sleep better.

Keep regular hours.

- Establish a regular wake up time each day, including weekends.
- Do not take naps. If you must nap, keep it short. Nap for 15 to 30 minutes early in the afternoon.

Do not go to bed too full or too hungry.

- If you eat a heavy meal before bedtime, your stomach has several hours of work to do. If you must eat late, eat light.
- It also can be hard to sleep if your stomach is empty. If you are dieting, have a low calorie snack before bedtime.

Exercise each day but not right before bedtime.

- Heavy exercise in the late evening increases your breathing and heart rate. This interferes with relaxation.
- Schedule work outs for earlier in the day. A leisurely walk before bed is okay. Try gentle exercises like stretching or yoga to help you relax at night.

Develop a bedtime routine.

- Set up a routine so your body knows it is time to go to sleep. For example, listen to some relaxing music, then read for 10 minutes, brush your teeth and go to bed.

Keep your bed as a place to sleep or have sex.

- Do not eat, write, watch TV or talk on the phone in bed.
- Keep the bedroom dark, quiet and a little cool to help you sleep.
- Use a fan or white noise machine, ear plugs or headphones to stop noises that may bother you at night.
- Do not go to bed unless you are sleepy. If you do not fall asleep after 15 to 20 minutes, get up and go to another room and do something to relax. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

Slow yourself down toward the end of the day.

- Do not engage in work or household chores right before bedtime. Put your duties aside at least 30 minutes before bedtime and perform soothing, quiet activities that will help you relax.
- Try a warm bath.
- Disconnect from your cell phone, laptop, tablet, TV and other devices 30 minutes or more before going to bed. The light from these devices can make it harder for your to fall asleep.

Cut down on cigarettes, second hand smoke and caffeine.

- Stimulants may affect your nerves for hours into the night.
- Avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening.
- Also avoid sugary, high carbohydrate foods at bedtime.

Do not drink alcohol after dinner.

- Drinking in the late evening may help you go to sleep. However, as the alcohol wears off, you may become restless and wake up early.

Get exposure to sunlight during the day.

- Open up curtains or blinds to let natural light in.
- If natural light is not available to you, talk to your doctor about using a light box.

If after following these guidelines you still struggle with getting a full night's sleep, talk to your doctor. Your doctor can recommend treatment options that are best for you.