

Tips for Better Sleep

Effective Sleep Habits

- Take time to unwind and relax before going to bed. It helps to create a ritual/routine for the 30 minutes to an hour prior to the time you want to fall asleep, in order to create a connection between the ritual and sleep. Elements of your routine might include...
 - Lock doors
 - Close curtains
 - Pick out clothes for the next day
 - Review schedule for the next day
 - Drink warm milk or decaf hot tea
 - Have a small healthy snack
- Don't stay in bed if you are wide awake
 - If after about 10-15 minutes in bed you are still wide awake, leave the room and do something calming (e.g., journaling, leisure reading, listening to soothing music) in another room until you feel drowsy.
 - Avoid turning on the TV as this may tempt you to stay up later.
 - If you were worrying while in bed, sit and write down your worries. Then, you might return to each worry and generate resolutions or actions you can take.
 - When you have the physical sensation that you may fall asleep, return to bed.
 - If unable to fall asleep after another 10-15 minutes, repeat the above steps as necessary.
 - Although this exercise can be draining, it will break the association your body has developed between being in bed and worrying, tossing and turning, etc. Your body will eventually be re-trained to associate being in bed with sleeping!
- Use bed only for sleep as much as possible
- Stop watching TV or using the computer at least an hour before going to bed
- Put your clock out of sight – watching the time only increases anxiety and frustration
- Don't consume alcohol or caffeine for at least 3 hours before going to bed
- Don't smoke for at least 3 hours before going to bed (better yet... quit!)
- Allow at least 2 hours between dinner and going to bed
- Exercise regularly during the day or early evening, allowing at least 3 hours between exercise and going to bed
- Stop working or doing strenuous house work at least 2 hours before going to bed
- Go to sleep and wake up at around the same time every night, even on weekends
- Avoid napping during the day, especially after 3pm. If fatigued during the day, restrict naps to 20-30 minutes using an alarm. Sleeping longer and engaging in deep sleep will disrupt your evening sleep pattern.

- Make your bed and bedroom as soothing and comfortable as possible (e.g., reduce brightness and noise, maintain a comfortable temperature, use a comfortable bed and pillow)
- Use relaxation strategies to promote relaxation (e.g., rocking chair, deep muscle relaxation, classical music, aromatherapy, white noise machines)
- If your insomnia is chronic, it may be helpful to engage in therapy to understand mental health issues that may be complicating your sleep problems
- Seek an evaluation by a physician to discuss whether prescription medication may be an option.

Poor Sleep Habits

- Doing things at night that stimulate the body or mind, such as...
 - Exercising
 - Smoking – nicotine is a stimulant
 - Watching TV or using the computer in bed – you want your body to associate being in bed with sleeping only
 - Drinking alcoholic or caffeinated drinks
 - Taking medicines late at night – some medicines can delay or disrupt sleep (if you take any prescription or non-prescription drugs on a regular basis, check with your doctor)
- Eating large meals late at night, especially if you are prone to indigestion or heartburn
- Lack of exercise
- Busy or stressful activities late at night
- Varying bedtimes
- Spending too much time tossing and turning in bed – this will only get you discouraged and stressed, which are not conducive to falling asleep
- Late day napping
- Poor sleep environment

Adapted from Pallesen, Nordhus, Havik, & Nielsen (2001). Clinical assessment and treatment of insomnia. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32(2), 115-124.