

SLEEP HYGIENE AND TIPS

Relax your mind

- Simple breathing exercises can help. Breathe, using your abdomen not your chest, through your nose for three seconds, then breathe out for three seconds. Pause for three seconds before breathing in again. Practice this for ten minutes at night (five minutes is better than nothing).
- Some people find that lavender oil, valerian or other herbs help them to sleep.
- If you still have problems, you could try massage, aromatherapy.
- If you still find yourself tossing and turning, abandon the bedroom and find something enjoyable and absorbing to do. Jigsaws are perfect. Don't go back to bed until you begin to feel sleepy.
- Relaxation techniques depend on individual's preference and you should first determine what soothes your mind and relaxes you.

Exercise regularly

- Regular exercise is a great way to improve your sleep. Just be careful not to do it close to bed time as exercise produces stimulants that stop the brain from relaxing quickly.
- This being the case, exercising in the morning is an excellent way to wake up the body. Going for a run or doing some aerobics releases stimulants into the body, which perks you up.
- If you are injured or disabled, you can still benefit from exercise. Check out disability exercise tips.

Create a calm bedroom environment

- Your bedroom should be for sleep only. Avoid turning it into an entertainment centre with televisions, computers and stereos.
- Appropriate temperature and ensuring darkness are key aspects in making the bedroom conducive to sleep.

Avoid alcohol

- It's fine to have a nightcap, but too much alcohol can make you restless. Alcohol is also a diuretic, which means it encourages you to urinate (never welcomed during the night).
- Drinking is also more likely to lead to snoring, which can restrict airflow into the lungs. This reduces oxygen in your blood which disturbs your sleep and contributes to your hangover.

Avoid caffeine

- Caffeine is a stimulant which can stay in your system for many hours. So avoid sources of caffeine such as coffee, chocolate, cola drinks and non-herbal teas.

Watch what you eat

- Eating a large heavy meal too close to bedtime will interfere with your sleep.
- Spicy or fatty foods may cause heartburn, which leads to difficulty in falling asleep and discomfort throughout the night.
- Foods containing tyramine (bacon, cheese, ham, aubergines, pepperoni, raspberries avocado, nuts, soy sauce, red wine) might keep you awake at night. Tyramine causes the release of norepinephrine, a brain stimulant.

Set a regular bedtime and wake up time

- Create a habit of going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, even on weekends. This helps anchor your body clock to these times. Resisting the urge for a lie-in can pay dividends in alertness.
- If you feel you haven't slept well, resist the urge to sleep in longer than normal; getting up on schedule keeps your body in its normal wake-up routine.
- Remember, even after only four hours, the brain has gained many of the important benefits of sleep.

It's only natural

- Most of us have a natural dip in alertness between 2 - 4pm.
- A 15 minute nap when you're tired can be a very effective way of staying alert throughout the day. Avoid napping for longer than 20 minutes, after which you will enter deep sleep and feel even worse when you wake up.

See a doctor if your problem continues

- If you have trouble falling asleep night after night, or if you always feel tired the next day, you might have a sleep disorder. It is advisable to seek more advice from your doctor. Most sleep disorders can be treated effectively.