

Many people have difficulty sleeping for a number of reasons – be it stress, worry, anxiety, pain, bad habits and routines. Poor sleep habits (often referred to as 'hygiene') can make these difficulties even worse. Obtaining healthy sleep is important for both physical and mental or emotional health. It can also improve productivity and overall quality of life.

Below are some essentials of good sleep hygiene. The most important point to remember when trying to get to sleep is not to try too hard. Worrying about sleep is much more tiring than just being awake.

BEFORE BED

- Establish a regular routine each night. This helps to 'cue' your body and mind to sleep.
- Eating and drinking for the last few hours before bed is likely to stimulate your body, so try to do these things earlier in the evening. Steering clear of food that can be disruptive right before sleep. Heavy or rich foods, fatty or fried meals, spicy dishes, citrus fruits and carbonated drinks can trigger indigestion for some people. When this occurs close to bedtime, it can lead to painful heartburn that disrupts sleep.
- Read or watch television outside the bedroom, the bedroom should be associated with sleep and perhaps sex. It should be a quiet calm space.



Sleep Better Live Better

- Try not to watch scary movies or shows with distressing content, these increase your adrenalin and stimulate wakefulness. Comedies are good as endorphins will be released which can help you to relax.
- Set your alarm each night and aim to get up at the same time each morning irrespective of how much sleep you had during the night.
- Taking a warm bath and/or having a massage are good for inducing sleep.
- Avoid vigorous exercise before going to bed. Yoga and stretching are good non-aerobic forms of exercise.
- Meditation and deep breathing exercises are also good techniques to calm your mind and body in preparation for sleep.
- Avoiding stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine close to bedtime. And when it comes to alcohol, moderation is key. Although alcohol is well-known to help you fall asleep faster, too much close to bedtime can disrupt sleep in the second half of the night as the body begins to process the alcohol.

ONCE IN BED

- Try to turn your mind away from the day's activities, any worries you may have or what you will do in the future. This is not the best time to think of these things. Think about pleasant places or events or use your imagination to conjure up relaxing images.
- If you find that you are unable to sleep while in bed, perform your relaxation routine as good relaxation can be as restful as good sleep.
- If you cannot get to sleep, GET UP after 20 minutes, don't lie there tossing and turning and becoming anxious watching the clock – this will only wake your body more with adrenalin and anxiety. Go and do something boring and relaxing to allow your body to feel sleepy again. Have some boring books or videos on hand.
- The environment in which you sleep is important. Try and ensure your bedroom is quiet, well-ventilated, dark and a comfortable temperature.

Extra Tips

- Avoid daytime naps or keep them to no more than 30 minutes before 3pm. If you are tired during the day, yoga, stretching, taking time for some breathing exercises and meditation or simply putting your feet up will help your body recover and may be less confusing for your 'sleep clock' than sleeping through the day and becoming a night owl.
- Ensuring adequate exposure to natural light. This is particularly important for individuals who may not venture outside frequently. Exposure to sunlight during the day, as well as darkness at night, helps to maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Making sure that the sleep environment is pleasant. Mattress and pillows should be comfortable. The bedroom should be cool (15–19°C) for optimal sleep. Bright light from lamps, cell phone and TV screens can make it difficult to fall asleep, so turn those light off or adjust them when possible. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, 'white noise' machines, humidifiers, fans and other devices that can make the bedroom more relaxing.



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