

# Sleep

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## The Importance of Sleep

We spend approximately 33% of our lives asleep and often don't think about it until we can't sleep. For many people, lack of sleep produces an array of consequences including higher stress, decreased concentration, and increased mistakes, to name a few.

College students are often susceptible to "pulling an all-nighter" to prepare for an upcoming test. They also play a balancing act with academics, work, student organization involvement, social time, family time, etc., that often leaves them feeling sleep deprived. Sleep deprivation can cause increased irritability; decreased motivation, memory, concentration, and productivity; increased proneness to injury; greater likelihood of problems such as headaches or upset stomach; increased mood swings; and decreased quality of life.

Sleep is extremely important to our health. In combination with a balancing diet and being physically active, good quality sleep helps the body to fend off viruses and bacteria by helping the immune system to stay as healthy as possible. Sleep adds energy to your days and nights, allows you to handle stress and minor irritations more effectively, and can improve the quality of your life. And, when we've had a good, full night of sleep, we simply feel better!

## To Nap or Not to Nap?

Many people fear that napping leads to restless sleep at night, but that's not necessarily true. Many people sleep poorly at night when they have an afternoon nap, but some people sleep quite a bit better.

Is napping for you? Conduct a two-week experiment: Take a daily nap for one week. Then skip naps the following week. During the entire period, keep a sleep log.

Note key facts in your sleep log:

- The times you wake up and fall asleep each day.
- How long it takes you to fall asleep each night.
- How many times you wake up in the night.

Now you've got the data you need to make a sound decision about napping. If you do become a "napper", keep your power-snoozes to around 30 minutes. Any longer and you'll have trouble waking and becoming alert again.

*Source: Mayo HealthQuest Newsletter*

# Tips for Better Sleep

## 1. Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day, even on the weekends.

Sticking to a schedule helps reinforce your body's sleep-wake cycle and can help you fall asleep more easily at night. Essentially, it gets the biological clock in sync.

## 2. Don't eat or drink large amounts before bedtime.

Eat a light dinner at least two hours before sleeping. If you're prone to heartburn, avoid spice or fatty foods, which can make your heartburn flare and prevent a restful sleep. Also, limit how much you drink before bed. Too much liquid can cause you to wake up repeatedly during the night for trips to the toilet.

## 3. Exercise at the right time for you.

Regular exercise can help you get a good night's sleep. The timing and intensity of exercise seems to play a key role in its effects on sleep. If you are the type of person who gets energized or becomes more alert after exercise, it may be best not to exercise in the evening. Regular exercise in the morning even can help relieve insomnia, according to a study.

## 4. Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol in the evening.

These are stimulants that can keep you awake. Smokers often experience withdrawal symptoms at night, and smoking in bed is dangerous. Avoid caffeine for eight hours before your planned bedtime. Your body doesn't store caffeine, but it takes many hours to eliminate the stimulant and its effects. And although often believed to be a sedative, alcohol actually disrupts sleep. Alcohol may make you sleepy at first, but it suppresses REM sleep and deeper stages of non-REM, and may wake you up later in the night.

## 5. Keep pets off the bed.

Does your pet sleep with you? This, too, may cause you to awaken during the night, either from allergies or pet movements. Fido and Fluffy might be better off on the floor than on your sheets.

## 6. Make your bedroom quiet, dark, cool, and comfortable.

Create a room that's ideal for sleeping. Think about lighting: if you need to get up during the night, don't use an overhead light, but rather a lamp or night-light. Think about temperature: Ideal room temperatures for sleeping are between 68 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures above 75 or below about 54 can disrupt sleep. Adjust humidity and noise levels to your preferences. Consider blackout curtains, eye covers, earplugs, extra blankets, etc. to create an environment that suits your needs.

## 7. Have a relaxing bedtime routine.

Do the same things each night to tell your body it's time to wind down. Try things such as taking a warm bath or shower, reading a book, or listening to soothing music. Relaxing activities done with lowered lights can help ease the transition between wakefulness and sleepiness. Also, unwinding early in the evening helps so that worries and distractions don't keep you from getting the restful night's sleep you need.

## 8. Go to bed when tired and turn out the lights.

If you don't fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, get up and do something else (journal, make a "to do" list, etc.). Go back to bed when you're tired. If you lay in bed agonizing over falling asleep, the stress will only prevent sleep.

## 9. Use sleeping pills as a last resort.

It is best to consult with your doctor before taking any sleeping pills to ensure the pills won't interact with any other medications you might be taking. The doctor can also help you determine the best dosage. Never mix alcohol and sleeping pills.

If the above practices still don't offer the sleep you need, talk with your doctor about an evaluation of the problem. Numerous other medical problems, from depression to sleep apnea, can also cause sleep disturbances and may need to be considered as part of the diagnosis.

# Sleep Strategies

## **Use aromatherapy.**

Lavender is a popular herbal sleep aid.

## **Move the clock.**

A clock can cause anxiety by reminding you it's late and you are still awake..

## **Do breathing exercises.**

Breathe deeply and slowly while counting to ten.

## **Dust the bedroom.**

Allergies to dust can keep you awake.

## **Regular Exercise.**

Exercise is an excellent relaxation technique, but avoid exercising 2-3 hours before bed time.

## **Avoid napping.**

It's best to get a full nights rest, but short naps can be useful if you don't get enough sleep at night.

## **Sleep in a dark room.**

Even minimal light can affect the quality of sleep.

## **Keep cool.**

Lower the thermostat before bedtime to induce sleepiness.

## **Create a bedtime ritual.**

Regularly do something that relaxes you as a trigger to sleep.

## **Use the bed only for sleeping.**

Doing anything else in bed, but sleeping teaches the brain the bedroom is for things other than sleeping.

## **Write down your thoughts.**

A swirling mind can wake us up. Keep a worry journal for putting your thoughts/tasks onto paper.

## **Did You Know?**

The expression "sleep tight" comes from the 16th and 17th centuries when mattresses were placed on top of ropes that needed regular tightening. - *The Better Sleep Council*

### **Websites worth checking out:**

[The Better Sleep Council](#)

[Mayo Clinic](#)

[WebMD](#)

[National Sleep Foundation](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)