

HOW TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

The following guidelines are recommended to help you improve both the quality and amount of your sleep.

1. Exercise during the day, preferably in the late afternoon before dinner. Aerobic exercise, not necessarily “aerobics,” but the type that gets your heart beating, gets you sweating and panting for 20 minutes or more is better, but 45 minutes to an hour of brisk walking will suffice.
2. Go to bed and get up at regular times, even if you're tired in the morning. Don't vary your time of going to bed or getting up. However, if you have consistent sleep problems, then try getting up half an hour earlier in the morning than your usual time; it may help you get to sleep that night.
3. Don't try to make yourself sleep. If you're unable to fall asleep after 20-30 minutes in bed, leave your bed, engage in some relaxing activity (such as sitting in a chair and listening to a relaxation tape, or having a cup of herbal tea), and do not return to bed until you're sleepy.
4. Avoid heavy meals before bedtime, but also avoid going to bed hungry. A very small snack about an hour before bedtime may be helpful.
5. Avoid any alcohol consumption or use of other substances in the evening. Avoid moderate-to-heavy use during the day. If you continue to have problems, stop use completely.
6. Reduce caffeine and nicotine consumption as much as possible. If you must have coffee, have it only in the morning and have no more than two cups.
7. Develop a sleep ritual before bedtime. This is some relaxing activity you do every night in the same order at about the same time before you get into bed. Avoid vigorous physical or mental activity and emotional upsets. A hot shower or bath may help you relax.
8. Eliminate non-sleep activities in bed (such as reading or doing other work) to strengthen the association between your bed and sleeping (unless these other activities are part of your sleep ritual).
9. Avoid napping during the day, unless you want to take a quick “power” nap no longer than 20 minutes and no later than the afternoon.
10. Reduce noise if needed through the use of ear plugs or a noise-masking machine (available at Radio Shack).
11. Keep your room temperature between 60 and 70 degrees.
12. If you can't sleep, do not get too upset; do not fight, resist, or fear sleeplessness. This will make it harder to fall asleep. Figure that the next day you will be somewhat tired but will still be able to do what you need to do.

Five Basic Strategies to Develop a Regular Sleeping Routine

1. Never oversleep

Never oversleep because of a poor night's sleep. This is the most crucial rule. Get up at about the same time every day, especially on the morning after you've lost sleep. Sleeping late for just a couple of days can reset your body clock to a different cycle -- you'll be getting sleepy later and waking up later.

2. Set your body clock

Light helps restart your body clock to its active daytime phase. So when you get up, go outside and get some sunlight. Or if that's difficult, turn on all the lights in your room. Then walk around for a few minutes. The calves of your legs act as pumps and get blood circulating, carrying more oxygen to your brain to help get you going.

3. Exercise

Keep physically active during the day. This is especially important the day after a bad night's sleep. When you sleep less, you should be more active during the day. Being less active is one of the worst things an insomniac can do. Strenuous exercise (brisk walking, swimming, jogging, squash, etc.) in late afternoon seems to promote more restful sleep. Also, insomniacs tend to be too inactive a couple of hours before bed. Do some gentle exercise. A stretching routine has helped many people.

4. Don't nap

Do not take any naps the day after you've lost sleep. When you feel sleepy, get up and do something. Walk, make the bed, or do your errands.

While studying, get up regularly (every 30 minutes, or more often if necessary) to walk around your room. Do a gentle stretch. That will increase the flow of oxygen to your brain and help you to be more alert.

5. Set a bedtime schedule using these two steps:

First, try to go to bed at about the same time every night. Be regular. Most people get hungry at 7 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. because they've eaten at those times for years. Going to bed at about the same time every night can make sleep as regular as hunger.

Second, go to bed later when you are having trouble sleeping. If you're only getting five hours of sleep a night during your insomnia period, don't go to bed until just five hours before your wake-up time. For instance, if you've been waking up at 7 a.m., don't go to bed until 2 a.m. No naps! Make the time you spend in bed sleep time. Still some insomnia? Go to bed proportionately later. Then, as your time in bed becomes good sleep time, move your going-to-bed time back 15 to 30 minutes a night and do that for a week or so.

This is the opposite of what we want to do: we want to go to bed earlier to make up the lost sleep. Learn to do what many sleep laboratories teach -- go to bed later the night after losing sleep.