

Sleep Hygiene Tips and Tricks

To increase the likelihood of restfulness and sleep:

1. Develop and follow a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends. Go to bed and get up at the same times each day and avoid anything longer than a 20-minute nap during the day.
2. Eat three balanced meals each day and avoid or reduce sugar intake.
3. Get regular exercise each day, preferably in the morning.
4. Get regular exposure to outdoor or bright light, especially in the late afternoon.
5. Refrain from using your bed in the daytime for things like watching TV, talking on the phone, looking at your laptop, or reading. The bed should be used just for sleeping and sex.
6. Reduce your caffeine intake and avoid drinking caffeine on an empty stomach.
7. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, heavy meals, and exercise late in the day.
8. Eat a light snack with complex carbs and/or L-tryptophan (but not protein or sugar) 60-30 minutes before your goal sleep time. Whole grains and warm milk are advisable.
9. Do not use alcohol to help you sleep, as alcohol interrupts the sleep cycle.
10. Avoid drinking large quantities of liquid at night.
11. Avoid long daytime napping, which steals sleep from nighttime.
12. Do your planning for the next day before you get into bed. Write down your plans if this helps, and then postpone any more thinking about it until the next day.
13. If you tend to worry at night, designate another time to write down problems and possible solutions – in the late afternoon or early evening, not close to bedtime. Make this a time-limited activity (i.e., set a timer for 10-15 minutes or so to do this and then stop.)
14. Related to both 12 and 13 above, it may be helpful to have a pad and pen near the bed so that any interrupting thoughts can be written down to deal with in the morning – and you won't be worrying about remembering them.
15. Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine. Relaxing rituals prior to bedtime may include a warm bath or shower, aromatherapy, reading, meditating, gentle stretching, listening to soothing music, etc.
16. Avoid engaging in a stimulating activity just before bed, such as playing a competitive game, watching an exciting program, or having an emotional discussion with a loved one.
17. Stop looking at all screens (phones, tv, computer) at least 30, preferably 60 minutes (or more!) prior to bedtime. If you read books on an electronic device, be sure to set it to night-time mode (no blue tones, which keep you awake). If your device does not have this setting, choose a "real" book for bedtime reading.
18. When prepared to sleep, turn off all lights and keep the room quiet and the temperature comfortable and relatively cool. It is best to store all electronics (such as charging phones) outside the bedroom. Use an alarm clock rather than a phone alarm for waking. Try an electric blanket if you are cold and a fan if you are hot. Try using a sleeping mask, earplugs, or white noise (machine or app) if needed.
19. Use a relaxation exercise or relaxing imagery just before going to sleep.

20. Avoid catastrophizing. Remind yourself that you need rest, and aim for reverie (i.e., dreaminess) and resting your brain. Remind yourself that if staying awake is not a catastrophe. Do not decide to give up on sleeping for the night and get up for the day.
21. Give yourself 30-60 minutes to fall asleep. If it doesn't work, evaluate if you are calm,* anxious** or ruminating.**

*If you are calm but wide awake:

1. Get out of bed and go to another room and read a book or do some other quiet activity that will not wake you up further. As you begin to get tired/sleepy, go back to bed. Keep the lights as low as possible. Bright lights will stimulate your body to wake up.
2. Try a light snack (such as an apple).

**If you are anxious or ruminating:

1. Practice deep belly (diaphragmatic) breathing. You can use a breath pacer app like Breathe+ if you find it helpful.
2. Try the 9-0 meditation practice: Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly saying in your mind the number 9. On the next breath out say the number 8, then say 7, and so on until you breathe out saying 0. Then start over but this time start with the number 8 (instead of 9) as you breathe out, followed by 7 and so on. Continue in this pattern until you have gone down to 1. (If you get lost, start over with the last number you remember.) Continue until you fall asleep.
3. Focus on the bodily sensation of the rumination (rumination is often escape from difficult emotional sensation).
4. Reassure yourself that these worries are just "middle-of-the-night" thinking and that in the morning you will think and feel differently.
5. If rumination doesn't stop, follow these guidelines: If it is solvable, solve it. If it is unsolvable, go deep into the worry all the way to catastrophe – the very worst outcome you can imagine - and then imagine coping with the catastrophe.
6. If nothing else works, with eyes closed and lights off, listen to public radio (BBC, NPR, etc.) at low volume. Public radio is a good choice for this because there is little fluctuation in voice tone or volume. There are also some bedtime story apps available now for this purpose.

If you do have a bad night's sleep:

1. Refrain from changing your daytime routine the next day. Even if you are tired, it is important to try and keep your daytime activities the same as you had planned. That is, don't avoid activities or stay in bed late because you feel tired. This can reinforce insomnia.
2. Avoid increasing caffeine intake the next day. This can keep you up again the following night.

Remember that you cannot fully control your sleep process. Trying too hard to control it will increase anxiety and tension. Continue to work on your sleep routine, making the conditions as supportive as possible for good sleep.