



Seven Steps to Improve your Sleep Quality

Are you experiencing sleep disturbances such as:

- Taking too long to fall asleep?
- Experiencing daytime sleepiness?
- Waking up during the night?
- Waking up too early?

Quality sleep is critically important as it prevents the development of many sleep-related disorders. If you experience that you don't enjoy quality sleep or that you don't enjoy enough sleep, you should consult your primary care physician or see a sleep specialist. Clinical studies have revealed that consequences of untreated sleep disorders include tiredness, lack of alertness, accidents and the development of comorbid diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes 2, obesity and depression to name a few. There are several simple things that you can do, commonly known as "sleep hygiene", to facilitate a good, quality night's sleep:

1. Allow enough time to sleep.

Falling asleep during the day is a likely sign that you are not getting adequate sleep. Most adults need 7.5 to 8.5 hours of sleep to function optimally. Plan your day to get enough sleep.

2. Prepare for sleep.

Practice relaxation techniques and try not to become upset or stressed before going to sleep. Stressful activities cause the body to secrete the stress hormone cortisol, which increases alertness. Try not to take your worries to bed and write down your thoughts for consideration during daytime. A pre-sleep ritual, such as a warm bath or a few minutes of reading, can help you fall asleep.

3. Keep regular sleep / wake cycles.

Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day sets the body's internal clock. Keeping a consistent cycle is essential to good sleeping habits. If you struggle to fall asleep, get out of bed after 20 minutes and go into another room, keep the lights dim and relax until you are tired enough to go back to bed to fall asleep. Do not watch TV or spend time on the computer.

4. Avoid napping during the day.

Many people find a need to take a nap in the afternoon. For those who have issues falling asleep or staying asleep, late-afternoon naps decrease the sleep drive. If you must nap, try to limit it to 30 minutes before 5 p.m.

5. Keep a healthy balance of nutrition and exercise.

Exercise regularly, but not right before bed. Regular exercise, particularly in the afternoon, can help deepen sleep. Strenuous exercise within two hours of bedtime can decrease your ability to fall asleep. Balance fluid intake before bedtime, drink enough to keep from waking up thirsty, but not so much that you will be awakened by the need for a trip to the bathroom. Consuming a light snack high in the amino acid tryptophan, like warm milk and bananas, an hour before bedtime may help you fall asleep.

6. Avoid these things four to six hours before bedtime.

Alcohol, caffeinated drinks, chocolate and any heavy, spicy or sugary foods can affect your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Many people believe that alcohol helps them sleep because it has an immediate sleep-inducing effect. However, a few hours later the alcohol levels in your blood start to fall, creating a stimulating effect that increases the number of awakenings and decreases sleep quality. Limit alcohol consumption to no more than one or two drinks per day.

7. Create a comfortable sleep environment.

Keep your bedroom comfortable, dark, quiet, cool and well-ventilated. Optimal temperature for sleeping is between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit. Reserve the bedroom for sleep.

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