

Good Sleep Hygiene

Things you should do:

1. Reserve your bed and bedroom for sleep. When you get in bed, turn off the lights immediately and try to go to sleep (i.e., do not read, relax, eat, or watch television in the bedroom). If you have trouble falling asleep, go to another room until you feel sleepy enough to try again. Occupy yourself with some non-exciting activity in the meantime. Get your body into the habit of sleeping when you go to bed rather than being engaged in some activity (i.e. thinking, reading) that competes with sleep.
2. Prepare your sleeping environment to produce maximum comfort and minimum distraction. Pay attention to light, noise, temperature, mattress, pillow, bedclothes and sleeping garments. You may benefit from a white-noise machine or earplugs to reduce distractions.
3. Establish and maintain a regular bedtime and arising time. Do not change your schedule on weekends. It is very important to maintain a regular arising time, even if you have had trouble sleeping the night before. In time, it should become easier to fall asleep at a regular time. A constant sleep-wake cycle is your goal.
4. Attempt to systematically determine what your optimal sleep amount is, and then work toward obtaining that amount of sleep each night. Sleep enough to feel refreshed, but no longer. Sleeping too much may aggravate your sleep problem the next night. Staying in bed for long periods can cause fragmented, shallow sleep. It is better to sleep a little less than to sleep too much.
5. Exercise regularly and in moderate amounts early in the day. Exercise at least two hours before bedtime.
6. Consider learning a relaxation technique, which can be used at bedtime.
7. Look for and practice any other activities that will help your body develop a regular and normal sleep schedule.
8. Discuss your sleeping problem with your doctor. Medical problems that cause sleep disorders need to be examined and treated.
9. Go to bed if you are sleepy at night.
10. Insomnia can be caused by regular use of sleeping pills. Discuss all the medications you use, both prescription and over-the-counter, with your doctor.
11. Coffee and other forms of caffeine after dinner cause sleeping problems when taken in the evening.
12. Alcohol causes disturbed and fragmented sleep. It may put you to sleep quickly, but you may wake up shortly thereafter. Alcohol interferes with physical and mental functions and should be avoided if possible.
13. A warm bath and/or light snack may be helpful before bedtime.
14. You may also wish to try sleeping outside your bedroom on the couch.

Things you should avoid:

1. Avoid reading, watching TV, etc. in your bed or bedroom.
2. Avoid sleeping environments that are distracting or uncomfortable.
3. Avoid irregular bedtimes and arising times and variations in amount of sleep.
4. Avoid naps during day/evening. Exception: *shift workers and elderly may benefit from 20-30 minute naps.*
5. Avoid exercise in the evening.
6. Avoid stimulating mental or physical activities in the late evening.
7. Avoid drinking caffeinated beverages (coffee, tea, colas, and cocoa) in the late afternoon or evening.
8. Avoid eating heavy or spicy food, especially in the evening or before bed.
9. Avoid late meals and large quantities of liquids.
10. Avoid going to bed hungry.
11. Avoid looking at clock or cell phone after going to bed.
12. Avoid immoderate use of alcohol.
13. Avoid any other activities that seem to aggravate your sleep problem.

How to get a good night of sleep:

Trouble falling or staying asleep can be normal if it happens only occasionally. But if you have insomnia on a regular basis and attention to good sleep hygiene alone is unsuccessful, the following may be helpful.

1. Get out of bed after 30 minutes of tossing, turning and trying to fall asleep. Staying in bed longer only prolongs the problem.
2. Go to another room and wind down. Read a dull book. This tome does not be unproductive, it just it just needs to be unexciting. For example, if you've always felt you should know more about the life of Sigmund Freud, this may be a good time to read up.
3. Don't take naps; and stay awake until you are very sleepy. Then go straight to bed.
4. When you return to bed, if you still cannot sleep after 30 minutes, repeat the above as many times as needed during the night.
5. Commit to using it for at least three consecutive nights before abandoning it as unsuccessful.
6. Always consult your doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping.