

# Sleep Hygiene

## What is Sleep Hygiene?

'Sleep Hygiene' is used to describe good sleeping habits. Research has shown that good sleeping tips and guidelines do help to provide long-term solutions to sleep difficulties.

Although there are many medications for insomnia, there are usually only effective in the short-term. Prolonged use of sleeping pills may even lead to dependence, which may interfere with developing good sleep habits that are independent of medication, further prolonging sleep difficulties. Do talk to your healthcare professional about what is suitable for you, but good sleep hygiene is recommended as an important part of treating insomnia, either alone or combined with other strategies such as cognitive therapy or medication.

## Sleep Hygiene Tips

1. **Train your body clock.** To train your body to sleep well, go to bed and get up at more or less the same time every day, even on weekends. This regular rhythm will make your sleep better, and make you feel better, as it provides your body something to work from.
2. **Sleep when you are tired.** Try not to be in bed unless you are feeling tired or sleepy. This will let your body associate the bed with sleeping time, and you will not be spending too much time awake in bed.
3. **Get up and re-try.** If you are unable to get to sleep after about 20 minutes or more, get out of bed and do something boring or calming until you feel sleepy. Return to bed and try to sleep again. Sit quietly on the sofa with the lights off as bright lights will tell your brain that it is time to be awake), or read something boring like the phone book. Do not do anything too interesting or stimulating, which will keep you awake for a longer time.
4. **Avoid nicotine and caffeine.** Avoid consuming any caffeine, in food such as coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate, or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before heading to bed. These substances act as stimulants and might interfere with the ability to fall asleep.
5. **Avoid alcoholic drinks.** Avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. Some people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps them to get to sleep at first, but in fact, alcohol interrupts the sleep quality.
6. **Bed is for sleeping.** For your body to associate bed with sleep, try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex. If you use your bed as a place to watch TV, read, eat, and do work, your body will not pick up this connection.
7. **Avoid naps.** To ensure that you are tired at bedtime, it is best to avoid taking naps during the day. If it is unavoidable, keep the nap short (i.e. less than an hour) and make sure to have it before 3pm.
8. **Create a nightly routine.** You can try to develop your own routine of doing things to remind and prepare your body that it is about time to sleep. It might be useful to do relaxing stretches or breathing exercises for 15 minutes before bed each night, or have a cup of caffeine-free tea while sitting calmly.
9. **Hot baths.** Having a hot bath around 1-2 hours before bedtime may be useful as it raises your body temperature, causing you to feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again. Research has shown that sleepiness is correlated with a drop in body temperature.
10. **Do not check the time.** Many people with sleep difficulties tend to check the time too much. Checking the clock frequently during the night can wake you up and adds on to negative thoughts such as *"Oh no, it is already so late, I'll never be able to sleep"* or *"It's so early, I have only slept for 4 hours, this is horrible.."*
11. **Keep a record.** Using a sleep diary or tracking your sleep (using apps or gears) can be useful to get the real facts about your sleep. Keeping a manual diary would involve watching the clock, and it is best to just use it for two weeks to spot the trend, and about two months later to review your progression.
12. **Exercise.** Regular physical activity is a good idea to help with good sleep, but avoid doing strenuous exercise 4 hours before bed. Morning walks are also a great way to start the day and feel refreshed.
13. **Watch your diet.** A healthy and well-balanced diet will help you to have a good sleep, but timing is important too. Some people might find that an empty stomach at bedtime is distracting, so it may be useful to have a light snack before bed. Avoid having a heavy meal close to bedtime as it can interrupt sleep. A warm glass of milk could help to induce sleep, as it contains tryptophan.
14. **A right environment.** The sleep environment is very important; do ensure that it is quiet and comfortable for sleeping. It is best for the room to be cool, with blankets to stay warm. Curtains or eyemask are useful to block out early morning light and earplugs to block off noise if you are a light sleeper.
15. **Keep to the daytime routine.** If you had poor sleep the previous night, keep to your planned daytime activities; do not avoid activities because of tiredness, this might worsen the insomnia.