



# **Sleep Hygiene**

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## **Defining Sleep Hygiene**

The term 'sleep hygiene' relates to sleep habits and their effect on the quality and quantity of sleep we obtain. Good sleep hygiene will help maximise the chances of obtaining the most effective sleep, in terms of both quality and duration, and enhance daytime alertness and performance. Poor sleep hygiene, on the other hand, can lead to disrupted sleep and daytime fatigue.

## **Sleep hygiene strategies**

Below is a summary of good sleep hygiene advice. Note that not all advice applies to each individual but adopting some of these suggestions can help if you are having trouble sleeping at night:

### **1. Daytime preparation:**

- Schedule social and domestic responsibilities to allow enough time for sleep
- Exercise during the day: *strenuous* exercise too close to your bedtime can have an alerting effect, making it more difficult to get to sleep
- If you work shifts and have trouble getting to sleep, try avoiding daytime naps

### **2. Evening preparation:**

- Avoid caffeine too close to bedtime
- Do some *light* exercise: light stretches or an evening walk can help enhance relaxation. Take care to avoid strenuous exercise in the evening, which can interfere with sleep
- Take a warm shower or a bath
- Don't go to bed too full or too hungry. This can reduce the 'restfulness' of your sleep. If you are hungry close to bedtime, a light snack such as a bowl of cereal can help.
- Avoid alcohol: alcohol may make you drowsy and lead you to fall asleep quickly. However, there is solid evidence that alcohol causes disruption to later stages of sleep, both reducing sleep quality and causing you to wake early.
- Avoid nicotine, which is a mild stimulant
- Write a to-do list before you go to bed to help reduce worry about things you have to do the next day

### 3. Preparing your bedroom:

- Keep your bedroom well-ventilated and around 18 degrees Celsius
- Block out light and noise. The brain is highly sensitive to light and noise: street lights or the light from a television can upset circadian rhythms and cause the brain to increase your wakefulness at a time when it should be decreasing. Heavy curtains or wearing an eye mask can also help ensure that your sleep environment is sufficiently dark. Similarly, turning off your phone or wearing ear plugs can help keep noise to a minimum. In some cases, disturbing noise can be blocked out by a fan or other source of unobtrusive white noise
- Make sure your bed and pillows are comfortable
- Avoid unrelaxing activities such as computer games, paying bills or watching television before bed. Excluding computers and televisions from the bedroom can help lead you to naturally associate the room with sleep.
- If possible, establish a bedroom routine, including going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time in the morning

### 4. Falling asleep:

If you are having problems getting to sleep, the following tips may help:

- Avoid 'clock anxiety' – staring at the time when you are having trouble getting to sleep can increase stress and make it even more difficult to get to sleep. One solution is to simply face the clock away from you
- Use a relaxation technique such as mentally concentrating on relaxing your muscles or trying to think of nothing
- If you still can't sleep, leave your bedroom and do something relaxing like reading in a dimly lit room. Only return to the bedroom when you are relaxed enough to go to sleep

### ***When sleep hygiene is not enough***

If you have adopted good sleep hygiene but still feel excessively tired during the day, speak to your doctor to check that there is no medical explanation.

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