

Rules for Better Sleep

1. **Establish a pre-sleep ritual.** Pre-sleep rituals, such as a warm bath or a few minutes of reading, can help you sleep.
2. **Avoid screens in the bedroom.** Only use your cell phone as an alarm clock if in the bedroom. At the appropriate bedtime, all screens should be turned off and you should go to bed.
3. **Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.** This includes caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea and many sodas, as well as chocolate, so be careful.
4. **Avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.** Many people believe that alcohol helps them sleep. While alcohol has an immediate sleep-inducing effect, a few hours later as the alcohol levels in your blood start to fall, there is a stimulant or wake-up effect.
5. **Reduce the number of cigarettes smoked;** the chronic use of tobacco disturbs sleep.
6. **Try a light snack before bed.** Warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas, may help you to sleep.
7. **Get up at a regular time in the morning.** This strengthens circadian cycling and leads to regular times of sleep onset.
8. **Avoid napping during the day.** If you nap throughout the day, it is no wonder that you will not be able to sleep at night. The late afternoon for most people is a "sleepy time." Many people will take a nap at that time. This is generally not a bad thing to do, provided you limit the nap to 30-45 minutes and can sleep well at night.
9. **Exercise regularly, but not right before bed.** Regular exercise, particularly in the afternoon, can help deepen sleep. Strenuous exercise within the 2 hours before bedtime, however, can decrease your ability to fall asleep.
10. **Use relaxation strategies prior to bed.** Progressive muscle relaxation and abdominal breathing exercises help divert the mind from list making and anxious thoughts which interfere with falling asleep.
11. **Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime.** These can affect your ability to stay asleep.

12. **Use background noise to help.** Occasional loud noises (eg. aircraft flyovers) disturb sleep even in people who are not awakened by noises and cannot remember them in the morning. A fan to provide background “white noise” may help those who must sleep close to noise.

13. **Keep bedroom temperature a little cool.** Excessively warm rooms disturb sleep but so can very cold rooms.

14. ***If you wake, do not remain in bed longer than 15-20 minutes*** if you cannot get back to sleep. Get up and read, have a light snack, do some quiet activity, or take a bath. You will generally find that you can get back to sleep 20 minutes or so later. Do not perform challenging or engaging activity such as office work, housework, etc. Do not watch television or view any type of screen.

Other Factors

- ***Several physical factors are known to upset sleep.*** These include arthritis, acid reflux with heartburn, menstruation, headaches and hot flashes.
- ***Psychological and mental health problems like depression, anxiety and stress are often associated with sleeping difficulty.*** In many cases, difficulty staying asleep may be the only presenting sign of depression. A Psychologist or physician should be consulted about these issues to help determine the problem and the best treatment.
- ***Many medications can cause sleeplessness as a side effect.*** Ask your doctor or pharmacist if medications you are taking can lead to sleeplessness.