



Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene is a set of habits that help you to good nighttime sleep quality and full daytime alertness. Good sleep is important for both physical and mental health. It can also improve productivity, relationships, and overall quality of life.

These are the two MOST EFFECTIVE things you can do to ensure better sleep.

- **Use your bed only for sleep** (and good sex). That means *don't* use your bed for watching TV, catching up on work, reading, arguing, worrying, unsatisfying sex, or *anything else*. When you feel sleepy, lie down. If you're not asleep in 15 minutes, **get up!** When you get up, a few rules: no screens, no bright lights, and no exercise. You can read a book, quietly fold laundry, or best of all – journal your thoughts and feelings. Then, when you feel sleepy again, go back to bed. If you're not asleep in 15 minutes – repeat!
- **Wake up at the same time every day.** Yep, even the weekends. Yep, even if you stayed up late to binge a favorite show. Yep, even if you're a little hungover. Same time. Every Day.

Here are some other ideas:

- **Spend an appropriate amount of time asleep in bed**, not too little or too excessive. Sleep needs vary across ages and are especially impacted by lifestyle and health. However, somewhere between 6 and 9 hours should work for you. You'll have to be a scientist about it – try different amounts and see how you feel the next day. Too little or too much sleep will mean decreased daytime performance: physical, cognitive, and emotional.
- If you *need* a nap, **limit daytime naps to 30 minutes**. Napping does not make up for inadequate nighttime sleep. However, a short nap of 20-30 minutes can help to improve mood, alertness and performance. Make sure you are up from your nap at least 8 hours before your normal bedtime.
- **Avoiding stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine close to bedtime.** And when it comes to alcohol, moderation is key. While alcohol is well-known to help you fall asleep faster, too much close to bedtime can disrupt sleep in the second half of the night as the body begins to process the alcohol.
- **Exercise to promote good quality sleep.** As little as 10 minutes of aerobic exercise, such as walking or cycling, can drastically improve nighttime sleep quality. But do it in the morning – exercising right before bed will keep you up!
- **Steer clear of food that can be disruptive right before sleep.** Heavy or rich foods, fatty or fried meals, spicy dishes, citrus fruits, and carbonated drinks can trigger indigestion or heartburn.
- **Regulate your sleep cycle with light.** Be sure you have lots of sunlight when you first wake up. And make sure your bedroom is as dark as possible. This doesn't just mean curtains – it means covering up and computer, TV, or any other “gadget” lights, etc. If you wake up early or do shift work, you may want to invest in a “sunlight lamp” (10,000 lux). Use it for 20 minutes when you wake up (but not if you have any history of mania or bipolar conditions!)
- **Preferably, no screens** while you're in bed. No watching Netflix until the wee hours and no cruising the internet from your phone in bed (and not for about an hour before bed, either). If you need or want to use screens before bed, install an app like Flux, that will change the color distribution on your computer or smart phone. If you Kindle, try changing the screen to black background with white letters.
- **Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine.** This could include taking warm shower or bath, reading a book, or light stretches. (If you're going to take a warm bath, make it about 90 minutes before sleep time.) When possible, try to avoid emotionally upsetting conversations and activities before attempting to sleep.
- **Make sure that the sleep environment is pleasant.** Mattress and pillows should be comfortable. The bedroom should be cool – between 60 and 67 degrees – for optimal sleep for most people. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, “white noise” machines, humidifiers, fans and other devices that can make the bedroom more relaxing.
- **Kick out your bed partner** if you need to. A partner who snores, tosses and turns, or gets up several times a night may be interrupting your sleep. Don't worry – sleeping better will *improve* your relationship, frustration tolerance, overall mood, etc.
- **Ditch the sleep apps and Fitbit monitors.** It turns out that people who *believe* they've slept badly have much worse performance the next day, regardless of how they actually slept. For example, you're actually *supposed* to wake up several times a night. As long as you can go back to sleep after your bathroom break or flipping your pillow – it's fine!
- **Keep pen and paper by the bed.** If you have trouble falling asleep because you're worried about tomorrow, don't try to keep it in your head. Write down anything you are worried about, or need to remember, so that you know you can check it in the morning.

If you've tried several of these (especially the top two), and you're still having trouble sleeping at least 6 hours, waking up without more than 9 hours, or you're still sleeping irregularly (it takes you more than 20 minutes to fall asleep, you wake up more than an hour early and can't go back to sleep, or you wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep within about 20 minutes, you never feel rested, you always have a morning headache, your partner says you are breathing irregularly, or you are consistently having unpleasant dreams)... let your mental health provider know!