

Sleep Hygiene

Getting enough sleep helps you deal with stress in your life better. If you are having troubles sleeping here are some tips to help.

- If possible go to bed and get up at the same time each day.
- Regular exercise can improve restful sleep, but try to avoid exercising 3 hours before bedtime because exercise can be very stimulating and can keep you up.
- When going to bed prepare your room for sleep:
 - Adjust temperature, a cooler room is better!
 - Darken the room, use eye masks if needed.
 - Block out noise, use ear plugs if needed.
- Don't take your worries to bed! Use relaxation techniques or journaling to help clear your mind before going to bed.
- Don't consume caffeine in the evening, have your last cup of coffee at lunch or not any later than the early afternoon. Also avoid cigarettes a couple hours before bed, because the nicotine in cigarettes can be very stimulating.
- Use bed only for sleep, and try to limit naps during the day. If you do nap, limit it to 30 minutes to avoid starting a sleep-wake cycle in the middle of the day.
- Don't use alcohol to help you sleep, instead learn and use relaxation exercises. Alcohol may make you drowsy initially, but as the alcohol wears off it increases your arousal. Alcohol and other drugs can disturb the sleep-wake cycle, and prevent you from going into deep sleep.
- A small snack before bed may help, like warm milk or hot decaf tea (try chamomile tea), but avoid large meals before bedtime.
- Use prescribed sleep aids with caution, alternatives include melatonin or relaxation techniques. If you want to take melatonin to help you fall asleep, you shouldn't need to take more than 6 mg at bedtime. You can purchase melatonin over the counter at your local store. Buy the 3 mg tablets, and take one to two tablets half an hour to an hour before going to bed.
Melatonin can interact with aspirin, NSAIDS, beta blockers, corticosteroids, valerian, kava kava and alcohol.
- Turn off the TV or set on a timer. TV is stimulating to your brain which can keep you up, and the TV left on while sleeping can wake you back up. Turn on a fan or humidifier to provide a white noise effect instead.
- If you don't fall asleep in 20-30 min, get up and do something relaxing until you are sleepy again; repeat same process if you wake up in the middle of the night.
- Take a hot shower or bath before going to bed to help you relax enough so that you can fall asleep. Combine with aromatherapy like chamomile or lavender for added benefits!