

SLEEP HYGIENE: HELPFUL HINTS TO HELP YOU SLEEP

Poor sleep habits (referred to as hygiene) are among the most common problems encountered in our society. We stay up too late and get up too early. We interfere with our sleep with drugs, chemicals and work, and we over stimulate ourselves with late-night activities such as television.

YOUR PERSONAL HABITS

- **Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.** Do not be one of those people who allow bedtime and the time you wake up to constantly change. The body “gets used” to falling asleep and waking up at a certain time, but only if this is relatively fixed. Even if you are retired or not working, this is an essential component of good sleeping habits.
- **Avoid napping during the day.** The late afternoon for most people is a “sleepy time” and they will want to take a nap at this time. As a rule, this is not a bad thing, provided you limit the nap to 30-45 minutes and can sleep well at night. If this doesn’t work for you try some other way to re-charge, like exercise.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime.** These can affect your ability to stay asleep.
- **Exercise regularly, but not right before bed.** Regular exercise, particularly in the afternoon, can help deepen sleep. Exercising strenuously within the two hours before bedtime, however, can make it harder to fall asleep.

YOUR SLEEPING ENVIRONMENT

- **Use comfortable bedding.** Evaluate whether or not this is a source of your problem, and make appropriate changes.
- **Find a comfortable temperature setting for sleeping and keep the room well ventilated.** If your bedroom is too cold or too hot, it can keep you awake. A cool (not cold) bedroom is often best for sleeping.
- **Try to control environmental factors.** Try to block out all distracting noise, and eliminate as much light as possible. Turn off the television!
- **Reserve the bed for sleep and sex.** Don’t use the bed as an office, workroom or recreation room. Let your body “know” that the bed is associated with sleeping.

GETTING READY FOR BED

- **Try a light snack before bed.** Warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas, may help you to sleep.
- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Yoga, deep breathing, guided imagery, relaxing music and other techniques may help relieve anxiety and reduce muscle tension.
- **Leave your worries behind.** Leave your worries about job, school, daily life and family behind when you go to bed. Some people find it useful to assign a “worry period” during the evening or late afternoon to deal with these issues. Others find it helpful to have a notebook and pen on the nightstand so they can write their thoughts down to keep them from dwelling on them while trying to sleep.
- **Establish a pre-sleep ritual.** Pre-sleep rituals, such as a warm bath or a few minutes of reading, can help you sleep.
- **Get into your favorite sleeping position.** If you don’t fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, get up, go into another room, and read until sleepy.

OTHER FACTORS (It is important to talk to your healthcare provider if these factors consistently interfere with your good sleep hygiene.)

- **Physical factors known to upset sleep.** These include arthritis, acid reflux with heartburn, menstruation, headaches and hot flashes.
- **Many medications can cause sleeplessness as a side effect.** Ask your doctor or pharmacist if medications you are taking can lead to sleeplessness.
- **Always follow the advice of your physician and other healthcare professionals.** The goal is to rediscover how to sleep naturally.