

Strategies for Better Sleep

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Sleep is important, but many people have trouble feeling rested when they sleep, or even getting to sleep. Some will toss-and-turn in their beds tonight, wishing for the ability to get to sleep. Maybe you are one of these people. Here are some ideas for how you can get a better night's sleep. Only use medication as a last resort and only by a doctor's prescription.

- Avoid daytime napping.
- Never spend long periods of time awake in bed.
- When you are unable to sleep, get up and go to another room. Stay up until you feel sleepy, and then return to bed. Get up again if sleep does not come quickly.
- Avoid worrying, thinking, planning, etc. in bed. If such mental activities come on automatically in bed, get up and stay up until you can return to bed without such mental activities interrupting your sleep.
- Use the bed only for sleeping. Do not read, watch TV, eat, etc. in bed. Sexual activity is the only exception to this rule.
- Restrict your time in bed to only the amount of time you need for sleep. To determine your sleep needs, keep a log on which you record your total sleep time each night for 2 weeks. Compute your average sleep time for these 2 weeks. Add 30 minutes to this average. The result is the time you should spend in bed per night.
- Take a hot bath 90 minutes before bedtime. A hot bath will raise your body temperature but it is the subsequent drop in body temperature that may leave you feeling sleepy.
- Use sunlight to set your biological clock. As soon as you get up on a sunny morning, go outside and turn your face to the sun for 15 minutes.
- Stay away from caffeine, nicotine and alcohol at least 4-6 hours before bed. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Coffee, tea, cola, cocoa, chocolate and some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine. Cigarettes and some drugs contain nicotine. Alcohol may seem to help you fall sleep in the beginning as it slows brain activity but you will end up having fragmented sleep.
- Participate in regular aerobic exercise. Exercise can help deepen your sleep.
- Refrain from exercise at least 4 hours before bedtime. Exercising in the morning or early afternoon will not interfere with sleep.
- Control loud noises during the night with ear plugs or a sound screening device (fan, air conditioner).
- Try a light bedtime snack of milk, cheese, or peanut butter. These foods may induce sleep.
- Don't eat late evening meals or drink large quantities of liquids in the evening.
- Control the temperature in your bedroom. Temperatures above 75 degrees Fahrenheit may cause broken sleep.
- Select a standard wake-up time. Use it every day regardless of the sleep you obtain on any particular night, even on weekends, if possible.