
What is sleep hygiene?

Sleep Hygiene is the controlling of all behavioral and environmental factors that precede sleep and may interfere with getting a good night sleep. It is the practice of following guidelines with the goal of having a more restful and effective sleep which can promote daytime alertness and help treat or avoid certain kinds of sleep disorders.

Here are some guidelines on how to have better sleep hygiene.

Your Personal Habits:

- Set a standard bedtime and rising time: Do not allow bedtime and rising time to drift. The body "gets used" to falling asleep at a certain time, but only if this is relatively fixed. Even if you are retired or not working, this is an important component of good sleeping habits.
- 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. If you tend not to sleep well at night after naps try a brief 10-15 minute nap 8 hours after arising.
- 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.
- Strive to do moderate to high intensity exercise each day: It is best not to do strenuous exercise close to bedtime.
- Do not eat or drink heavily for 3 hours before bedtime.
- If you smoke, try not to smoke after 7pm: Do not smoke to get yourself back to sleep.
- Limit caffeine use or avoid caffeine entirely for a 4- week trial period to see if sleep improves.

Your Sleeping Environment:

- Use comfortable bedding. Uncomfortable bedding can interfere with good sleep. Evaluate whether or not this is a source of your problem and make appropriate changes. Is your mattress too soft or too firm? Is your pillow the right height and firmness?
- 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 the most conducive to sleep.
- Block out all distracting noise and eliminate as much light as possible. If you have to get up at night, don't expose yourself to bright light.
- Keep the clock face turned away, and don't look at what time it is when you wake up at night.
- 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 before bed. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, deep breathing and others may help relieve anxiety and reduce muscle tension.
- Don't take your worries to bed. Leave your worries about job, school, daily life, etc., 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.
- 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.