

6 STEPS TO BETTER SLEEP

Background

▪ The Importance of Sleep

While you sleep, your brain works to consolidate the day's learning into memory and to renew and re-energize the body.

▪ What Happens When We Sleep

◆ Sleep Cycles

▪ Non-REM – Stages 1-4

▪ Stage 1 – Light Sleep

Half awake, half asleep. Muscle activity slows and slight twitching may occur. We can be easily awakened in this stage.

▪ Stage 2 – True Sleep

Within ten minutes of sleep, we enter stage 2, which lasts around 20 minutes. Breathing and heart rate begin to slow. This period accounts for the longest part of human sleep.

▪ Stage 3 and 4 – Deep Sleep

During stage 3, the brain begins to produce delta waves, large, slow waves (high amplitude, low frequency). Breathing and heart rate are at their lowest.

Stage 4 is characterized by rhythmic breathing and limited muscle activity. If we're awakened during deep sleep, it takes awhile to adjust, and we may feel groggy and disoriented for several minutes.

▪ REM

The first rapid eye movement (REM) period usually begins 70-90 minutes after we fall asleep. We usually have 3-5 REM episodes each night. Although we're not conscious, the brain is very active – often even more active than when we're awake. This is the periods when most dreams occur. Our eyes dart around, breathing quickens, and blood pressure rises, but our bodies are effectively paralyzed, said to be nature's way of keeping us from acting out our dreams. After REM, the whole cycle begins again.

▪ How to Know If You're Sleeping Enough

Most people need 7½ to 8½ hours of sleep each night, but some people need 10 hours. Only you know the right amount for you. If you press the snooze button, find yourself sleepy during the day, have trouble focusing at work, are complaining about being tired or irritable, or if you sleep longer on the weekends than during the week, you probably aren't getting enough sleep every night.

◆ Are naps okay?

Most of us have a natural dip in alertness between 2 and 4 p.m. A short nap (no more than 20 minutes) before 3:00 in the afternoon can help refresh you and should not impact your ability to sleep that night.

Deep belly breathing (at least 3 full breaths) can refresh you in the same way. Combining belly breathing with arm movement also helps.

▪ Sleep Disorders

If you've looked at your sleep environment and everyday routine to make sure you're not sabotaging your sleep and you still feel sleepy after a full night's sleep, see your doctor.

A Sleep Diary can be a very helpful tool. Note what kind of problem affects your sleep or if you're sleepy when you want to be awake and alert. Write down as much information as you can, including any remedies you've tried and how they affected your sleep. Try these tips and record your sleep, level of alertness and sleep-related activities in a sleep diary. If problems persist, your sleep diary can give your doctor valuable information.

If you sleep with a partner, ask them if they notice any snoring, leg movements, and/or pauses in breathing. Include this information in your sleep journal.



Common causes of insomnia include stimulants and stress. Stimulants can include caffeine, sugar, aerobic exercise, arguing, violent TV shows and news. Stress may be a result of anxiety, worry, depression, fear, or unpleasant memories. Avoid the regular use of prescription sleep aids. Although they induce sleep within 10 to 20 minutes, they interfere with the deeper stages of sleep and impair functioning at your best the next day. For the rest of the evening, we'll look at some natural alternatives to help you sleep better.

6 Steps to Better Sleep

1 Environment

Reserve your bedroom as a comfortable, relaxing haven, a place for warm, intimate and relaxing relationships.. Don't use it to pay bills, watch TV, discipline the kids, brainstorm, argue, or work.

❖ Light

Light is one of the body's most powerful time cues. A dark room is the most restful, so it should be as dark as possible. Consider using blackout curtains or eye shades if your room is too light.

❖ Noise

Occasional loud noises disturb sleep even in people who don't wake up or remember the noise in the morning. Steady, low sounds are soothing because they block out distracting noises. Depending on the level of noise, ear plugs, white noise machines or fans can help.

❖ Temperature

Your room should not be excessively warm OR cool. The ideal temperature seems to be around 60-65 degrees with plenty of blankets available.

❖ Bed

Your bed should be comfortable, supportive, and allow for plenty of movement, not too soft, too hard, too small, or too old. If you wake regularly feeling stiff and sore, if you aren't sleeping as well as you did a year ago, or if your bed shows signs of wear and tear, it might be time for a new one. Go to a retailer and test out new mattresses, lying on them to assess comfort, support, and space. If you sleep with a partner, be sure to take them with you when testing new beds. Mattresses and foundations work together, so it's best to replace both at the same time.

2 Nutrition

❖ Timing, Amount, and Ingredients

Eating a large, heavy meal too close to bedtime will interfere with sleep. Finish your meal at least 3 hours before. Eating a high-protein meal without accompanying carbohydrates may keep you awake, since protein-rich foods also contain the amino acid tyrosine, which perks up the brain. Eat only until your full, remembering it takes 10 minutes for your brain to get the signal that you're full.

❖ Tryptophan

Tryptophan is one of the essential amino acids that your body uses to make neurotransmitters such as serotonin and melatonin. These neurotransmitters are chemical nerve messengers that help your brain shut down for the night and be fully awake for the day. Turkey, seafood, chicken, milk, bananas, yogurt, beans, tuna, dates, figs, sesame seeds and cashews are high in tryptophan. More of the tryptophan gets to your brain when you have a carbohydrate along with it, so cheese and crackers or milk and a whole-grain cookie are good bedtime snacks.



❖ Tyramine

Tyramine has the opposite effect of tryptophan. It increases the release of norepinephrine, a brain stimulant. Foods containing tyramine include bacon, cheese, pepperoni, raspberries, avocado, chocolate, eggplant, potatoes, sauerkraut, sugar, sausage, spinach, tomatoes, and red wine.

❖ Nocturnal hypoglycemia

Eat enough dinner that you don't wake up hungry. Also, bedtime snacks with complex carbohydrates keep sugar levels steady through the night.

❖ Snacks and Dinners

Good bedtime snacks:

Whole grain cereal with milk

Hazelnuts and tofu

Peanut butter sandwich on whole grain bread

Meals high in carbohydrates and low to medium protein will help you relax in the evening and set you up for a good night's sleep:

- ❖ pasta with parmesan cheese
- ❖ scrambled eggs and cheese
- ❖ tofu stirfry
- ❖ hummus with whole wheat pita bread
- ❖ seafood, pasta, and cottage cheese
- ❖ meats and poultry with veggies
- ❖ tuna salad sandwich
- ❖ chili with beans, not spicy

3 Stimulants, Depressants, and Chemicals

❖ Caffeine

Caffeine in the evening disrupts sleep, even in people who don't feel it does. It takes at least 6-8 hours, sometimes 12-14 hours, for caffeine to be eliminated from your system, so it's best to avoid caffeine after midday. In addition to caffeinated coffees and teas, caffeine is also present in chocolate.

❖ Alcohol

Alcohol may help tense people fall asleep more quickly, but the sleep will be fragmented, light, and restless. Alcohol is a diuretic, which means it encourages you to urinate. Drinking is also more likely to lead to snoring, which can restrict airflow to the lungs and reduce oxygen in your blood, disturbing sleep and contributing to a hangover.

❖ Nicotine

Tobacco is a stimulant that makes the heart rate and blood pressure rise. If you choose to smoke, avoiding it in the hour or two before bed will make sleep more restful. Smokers take longer to fall asleep, wake more often, and often experience more sleep disruption as the body suffers nicotine withdrawal.



4 Exercise

❖ During the Day

Steady daily exercise, at least 20 minutes 3 X per week, deepens sleep over the long run. Note, however, that occasional one-time exercise doesn't directly influence sleep that night. Finish all stimulating exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime.

❖ Bedtime Routine

Gentle movement such as yoga, Tai Chi or Qi Gong at night can help quiet the mind and prepare it for sleep.

5 Routine

If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine. For example, if looking at a bedroom clock makes you anxious about how much time you have before you have to get up, turn it around or move it out of sight. Create a relaxing bedtime routine for yourself like locking the doors, brushing your teeth, light reading, a warm bath – we'll discuss more ideas later. If you read, avoid very stimulating material and do so in dim light.

❖ Sleep Schedule

Having a regular wake time seems to strengthen circadian cycling and lead to regular times of sleep onset. Get up on time, even if you feel you haven't had enough rest. If you are sleepy during the day, a short nap (20 minutes or less) or deep breathing should help with alertness. Try to get to bed within an hour of your regular time, and don't deviate from your sleep schedule for more than one night in a row, if you can help it.

❖ Meal Timing

Finish eating at least 2-3 hours before bed. Ayurveda, the sister science of yoga, recommends the last meal be no later than 6 in the evening.

❖ Television and Computers

Eliminate television and computers for at least 30 minutes before bed. The flickering light and stimulating content can inhibit restful sleep, as the mind will stay stimulated. The light from these appliances is almost as intense as sunlight, which fools your body and mind into thinking it's nowhere near time to sleep.

❖ Lighting

Dimming the lights in for 30 minutes to an hour or so before bed can help prepare the mind and body for sleep.

6 Relaxation

Relieving tension and stress will help clear your mind before bed. If your mind is full of lists of things you still need to do, write them down on a list for tomorrow, then give yourself permission to relax and sleep.

❖ Sight and Sound

- Quiet Music
- White Noise (as we discussed in the "Environment" section – machines, fans)
- Dim Lighting

Light helps signal to the brain when it should wake up and sleep. Get into bright light as soon as you can upon awakening in the morning, but keep lights low for at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

❖ Sensation

- Massage – partner or Yamuna Body Rolling
- Breathing – abdomen/nose - focus on the breath, either while seated or lying down; left nostril breathing
- Gentle Movement – yoga, qi gong
- Guided Relaxation – tense and release muscles
- Warm Bath

❖ Warm Milk or Herbal Tea – chamomile, anise, fennel, and lavender are known for their soothing/relaxing qualities.

If you can't get to sleep for over 30 minutes, get out of bed and do something you find relaxing in dim light until you are sleepy.



Relaxing Postures

Flapping Fish

- Lie on the stomach, with straight legs.
- Place the palm of the left hand face down on the floor, and rest the right palm face down over it.
- Turn the head, resting the right cheek on the back of the right hand.
- Move the right knee upward toward the right elbow, placing it anywhere you are comfortable.
- If you prefer, you may leave both legs straight.
- Gently close the eyes and mouth, breathing through the nose.
- Mentally relax the body.
- Stay for 5 – 20 minutes.



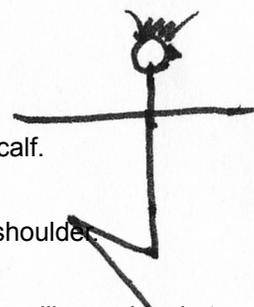
Legs Up the Wall

- Sit close to a wall, legs extended or bent
- If you'd like, place a tightly rolled mat or a blanket close about 6" from the wall, parallel to it.
- Turn into the wall, letting your legs extend upward as your torso lowers to the floor.
- Keep your backside as snug to the wall as possible.
- If you're using the rolled up mat or blanket, it should be positioned under your lower back.
- Roll the flesh of your shoulders under and toward the spine
- Place hands palms up on the floor, 6-12" from the body.
- If hamstrings are tight and you feel them pulling and uncomfortable, position yourself further from the wall. You can also bend your knees, bringing feet together.
- Gently close the eyes and mouth, bringing the attention to your breath.
- Stay for 5-10 minutes.



Reclining Supine Twist

- Begin on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor.
- Cross the right leg over the left, allowing the toes to dangle or wrapping them around the left calf.
- Take the arms out the the side at shoulder level, in a T position with your body.
- Inhale. On the exhale, lower the knees to the left as your turn the head to look over the right shoulder.
- Press shoulders into the floor.
- Knees drop only to the level that's comfortable for your back. You can also support them with a pillow or blanket.
- Belly button pulls in toward the spine, back lengthens up and away from the waist.
- Hold for a couple of minutes, then repeat on the other side.



Corpse Pose

- Lie flat on the back on a firm, flat surface in a quiet place. Feet about 18-24" apart.
- Place your hands about 6-12" from the waist with palm fingers curled up.
- The head is in line with the spine, not turned to either side.
- Eyes and mouth are closed with ease.
- Breathe easy and concentrate on your navel zone.
- Stay for 10-20 minutes.
- If you'd like, count backward from 27, inhaling and exhaling 27, then 26, and so on, starting over at 27 if you lose count.
- Follow the breath (or the number if you're counting), not the wanderings of the mind. If the attention wanders, simply bring it back to the breath.
- To come out, wiggle fingers and toes, then slowly turn onto left side, knees bent, right arm alongside the body, left arms supporting your head. Stay here for a couple of minutes, then slowly open your eyes and use your left arm and elbow and your right hand to press you slowly back up to a seated position.

