Improving Your Sleep

How to sleep better tip 1: Keep a regular sleep schedule

Getting in sync with the body's natural sleep-wake cycle (the circadian rhythm) is one of the most important strategies for achieving good sleep. If you keep a regular sleep schedule, going to bed and getting up at the same time each day, you will feel much more refreshed and energized than if you sleep the same number of hours at different times. This holds true even if you alter your sleep schedule by only an hour or two. Consistency is vitally important.

• Set a regular bedtime. Go to bed at the same time every night. Choose a time when you normally feel tired, so that you don't toss and turn. Try not to break this routine on weekends when it may be tempting to stay up late. If you want to change your bedtime, help your body adjust by making the change in small daily increments, such as 15 minutes earlier or later each day.

• Wake up at the same time every day. If you're getting enough sleep, you should wake up naturally without an alarm. If you need an alarm clock to wake up on time, you may need to set an earlier bedtime. As with your bedtime, try to maintain your regular wake-time even on weekends.

• Nap to make up for lost sleep. If you need to make up for a few lost hours, opt for a daytime nap rather than sleeping late. This strategy allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm, which often backfires in insomnia and throws you off for days.

• Be smart about napping. While taking a nap can be a great way to recharge, it can make sleep problems worse. If you must nap, do it in the early afternoon, and limit it to thirty minutes.

• Fight after-dinner drowsiness. If you find yourself getting sleepy way before your bedtime, get off the couch and do something mildly stimulating to avoid falling asleep.

How to sleep better tip 2: Create a relaxing bedtime routine

If you make a consistent effort to relax and unwind before bed, you will sleep easier and more deeply. A peaceful bedtime routine sends a powerful signal to your brain that it's time to wind down and let go of the day's stresses.

Make your bedroom more sleep friendly

• Turn off your television and computer. Many people use the television to fall asleep or relax at the end of the day, and this is a mistake. Not only does the light suppress melatonin production, but television can actually stimulate the mind, rather than relaxing it. Try listening to music or audio books instead, or practicing relaxation exercises.

• Don't read from a backlit device at night (such as an iPad). If you use a portable electronic device to read, use an eReader that is not backlit, i.e. one that requires an additional light source such as a bedside lamp.

• Change your bright light bulbs. Avoid bright lights before bed, use low wattage bulbs instead.

• When it's time to sleep, make sure the room is dark. The darker it is, the better you'll sleep. Cover electrical displays, use heavy curtains or shades to block light from windows, or try a sleep mask to cover your eyes

• Keep noise down. If you can't avoid or eliminate noise from barking dogs, loud neighbours, city traffic, or other people in your household, try masking it with a fan, recordings of soothing sounds, or white noise. You

can buy a special sound machine or generate your own white noise by setting your radio between stations. Earplugs may also help.

• Keep your room cool. The temperature of your bedroom also affects sleep. Most people sleep best in a slightly cool room (around 65° F or 18° C) with adequate ventilation. A bedroom that is too hot or too cold can interfere with quality sleep.

• Make sure your bed is comfortable. You should have enough room to stretch and turn comfortably. If you often wake up with a sore back or an aching neck, you may need to invest in a new mattress or a try a different pillow.

Relaxing bedtime rituals to try:

• Read a book or magazine by a soft light

• Take a warm bath

• Listen to soft music

• Do some easy stretches

• Wind down with a favourite hobby

• Listen to books on tape

Keep your bed for sleeping

• Don't watch television or play on the computer in bed. Use your bed only for sleep. That way, when you go to bed, your body gets a powerful cue: "it's time to nod off".

How to sleep better tip 3: Eat right and get regular exercise

Your daytime eating and exercise habits play a role in how well you sleep. It's particularly important to watch what you put in your body in the hours leading up to your bedtime.

• Stay away from big meals at night. Try to make dinnertime earlier in the evening, and avoid heavy, rich foods within two hours of bed. Fatty foods take a lot of work for your stomach to digest and may keep you up. Also be cautious when it comes to spicy or acidic foods in the evening, as they can cause stomach trouble and heartburn.

• Cut down on caffeine. You might be surprised to know that caffeine can cause sleep problems up to ten to twelve hours after drinking it! Consider eliminating caffeine after lunch or cutting back your overall intake.

• Avoid drinking too many liquids in the evening. Drinking lots of water, juice, tea, or other fluids may result in frequent bathroom trips throughout the night. Caffeinated drinks, which act as diuretics, only make things worse.

• You'll also sleep more deeply if you exercise regularly. You don't have to be a star athlete to reap the benefits—as little as 20 to 30 minutes of daily activity helps. And you don't need to do all 30 minutes in one session. You can break it up into five minutes here, 10 minutes there, and still get the benefits.