

## **Good Sleep Hygiene Tips**

Sleep hygiene is controlling behavioural and environmental factors that precede sleep and may interfere with sleep. You might not be able to control all of the factors that interfere with sleep, but you can adopt good habits that encourage better sleep.

### **#1 Stick to a sleep schedule**

Have a regular bedtime and rise time, even on weekends and holidays and regardless of how you slept the night before. Being consistent helps regulate your body's sleep-wake cycle and promotes a better sleep at night.

Establishing a fixed rise time is a particularly important component of your sleep schedule as it is the easiest way to reset your sleep-wake cycle when it gets disrupted. Further, you have control over your rise time, whereas you can't always predict when you will fall asleep.

When picking a bedtime, choose a time when you normally feel sleepy. It is important to note that if you can't fall asleep at this time, don't force it. This will only lead to frustration. Rather, get out of bed and return only when sleepy (see #5).

### **#2 Create a comfortable sleeping environment**

Create a room that's ideal for sleeping. Consider the comfort of your bed, the air temperature, and levels of noise and light. Consider using room-darkening curtains, earplugs, a fan, or other devices to create an environment that suits your needs.

Also consider your mattress, pillow, and bedding. Choose what feels comfortable to you and considering making some new purchases if appropriate.

Consider ways to minimize disruption of your sleep by others, including your partner, children, or pets.

### **#3 Reserve your bed for sleeping (sex is the only exception)**

This will help your brain form a strong association between your bed and sleepiness/sleep, which will help you fall asleep more quickly and stay asleep. Try to avoid reading exciting materials, watching TV, or doing work in bed, as these activities will keep your mind active, which gets in the way of sleep. Further, they will weaken the association between your bed and sleep.

#### **#4 Go to bed only when sleepy**

Going to bed when you are not sleepy will likely lead to frustration. Further, lying awake in bed will weaken the association between your bed and sleepiness.

#### **#5 Get out of bed if you can't fall asleep**

If you don't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something boring or relaxing (no TV). Return to bed only when sleepy. Repeat as necessary.

This strategy can make it feel as if you are making things worse. However, if you stick with it, it can really help. This strategy helps to strengthen your brain's association between your bed and sleep because you are minimizing the time spent in bed awake.

#### **#6 Pay attention to ingested substances**

Caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, sleeping pills, certain medications and foods can affect your sleep.

- Caffeine is a stimulant and should be discontinued 6 hours before bedtime. Be aware of drinks, food, and medications that contain caffeine. Coffee, some teas, soft drinks, and chocolate all contain caffeine.
- Alcohol is a depressant. Even though it may help you fall asleep initially, it can cause awakenings later in the night. Discontinue alcohol 4 hours before bedtime.
- Nicotine is a stimulant and should be avoided near bedtime. Further, people who smoke actually experience nicotine withdrawal as the night progresses, making it hard to sleep. So, consider quitting smoking. And don't chew Nicorette gum.
- Sleeping pills alter the quality of your sleep (and may affect how you feel that next day). If sleeping pills are used regularly, your sleep may become even more disrupted when they are discontinued. Please consult your prescribing physician if you are considering stopping sleep medication.
- Although a light snack may be sleep inducing, large amounts of food and certain type of food too close to bedtime can interfere with sleep. Avoid spicy, heavy/rich, or sugary foods close to bedtime.
- Avoid excessive fluid close to bedtime. Otherwise, you may be taking many trips to the toilet!
- Avoid all of these substances during night-time awakenings.

#### **#7 Create a bedtime routine**

Doing the same pre-sleep activities every night will send a powerful cue to your body

and brain that it's time to wind down and go to sleep. Establish this routine and follow it every night. For example, have a hot shower, put on your pajamas, brush your teeth, and then engage in a relaxing activity (outside of your bed) until you start to feel sleepy and then go to bed.

### **#8 Relax, relax, relax**

Choose a relaxing activity to do before bed. This will help promote better sleep by calming your body and mind, and easing the transition between wakefulness and sleepiness. This may include taking a warm bath or shower, reading a book, listening to soothing music, meditating, practicing deep breathing, stretching, doing some simple preparations for the next day (e.g., making your lunch), etc. Avoid stimulating activities close to bedtime.

### **#9 Limit daytime napping. Eliminate if possible**

Long naps during the day can interfere with sleep at night because they affect your sleep-wake cycle. Resisting the urge to nap will help promote good sleep at night because you will likely be sleepier, and more likely to fall asleep quickly and stay asleep. If you choose to nap during the day, limit your nap to 15-30 minutes (1 hour max) and start it before 3 pm.

### **#10 Include exercise in your daily routine**

Regular exercise can promote better sleep, helping you to fall asleep more quickly and enjoy deeper sleep. Be mindful of the timing of your exercise though. Vigorous exercise within 2-4 hours of bedtime can actually disrupt your sleep. The best time to exercise is in the late afternoon or early evening. Although exercising in the morning is good for you, it won't help with sleep.

### **#11 Set your worries aside**

Leave your worries out of the bedroom. Try scheduling a "worry time" or "clear your head time" in the evening to deal with your worries. If you start to worry close to bedtime or during a nighttime awakening, make a quick note about your worries and tell yourself that you will address them in the morning or the next day during your allotted worry time. This will help you get back to sleep and will give you the opportunity to tackle your worries the next day when you are fresh and better able to deal with them.

### **#12 Get some natural light**

Spend some time outdoors or in natural light every day. Try some outdoor exercise, take

your lunch break outside, let as much light into your home/workplace as possible, etc. Getting some sunlight early in the day can be helpful for setting your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. During winter months, full spectrum lighting can assist in wakefulness during the day.

### **#13 Boost your melatonin production at night**

Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone that helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle. Chemically, melatonin makes you drowsy and lowers the body temperature, preparing the body for sleep. Production of it is controlled by light exposure. In the presence of light, melatonin production is inhibited. In the dark, production is permitted. There are things you can do to boost your melatonin production at night.

- Turn off your TV or computer. The light from these devices will suppress melatonin production AND stimulate the mind. Both will decrease the likelihood that you will fall asleep.
- Change your light bulbs – avoid bright lights before bed. Use low-wattage bulbs instead.
- Make sure your room is dark when you try to go to sleep. The darker the room, the better you'll sleep. Use heavy curtains to block light from windows, cover electrical displays, try an eye mask, etc.
- If you use a portable electronic device to read at night, use a device that is not backlit. A backlit device is one that is made visible and brighter by use of lights behind it (e.g., iPad, Smart Phone). Reading from one of these can inhibit melatonin production.