

Suggestions for Better Sleep

Reference: David Musnick, MD

Minimize or Avoid Stimulants

- **Avoid or minimize things that could be too stimulating** (i.e., T.V., computer games)
- **Avoid alcohol** (wine, beer and hard liquor) within a few hours of you bedtime. The effect of alcohol is short lived and people will often wake up several hours later, unable to fall back asleep. Alcohol will also keep you from falling into the deeper stages of sleep, where the body does most of its healing.
- **Avoid caffeine** containing beverages or foods after 2pm and if you are sensitive to caffeine avoid it after 12 noon (caffeine containing sodas or water including Pepsi, Coke, Mountain Dew, tea, coffee, lattes, chocolate, coffee or espresso containing ice cream). Better yet, try to quit caffeine all together (refer to Guidelines to Healthy Eating for a step-by-step guide on how to do so.
- A recent study showed that in some people, caffeine is not metabolized efficiently and they can feel the effect long after consuming it. As such, an afternoon cup of coffee or tea will keep some people from falling asleep. Also, some medications, particularly diet pills contain caffeine.
- **Caffeine contributes** to the need to urinate frequently. This can disrupt sleep.
- **Avoid drinking** more than 4-8 ounces of fluid before going to bed.
- **Avoid Sudafed** or other decongestant cold medicines at night.
- Some medications may have stimulating effects. Consult your pharmacist and doctor to determine if any of them might be contributing to sleep problems. Do not discontinue them without permission from your doctor.
- **Avoid large meals close to bedtime.** Large meals may lead to reflux, heart burn and other digestive pains which may result in poor sleep.

- **Exercise** before 6pm or at least 3 hours before bedtime.
- **Avoid cigarettes.** Cigarettes are a stimulant and make it difficult to fall asleep. Also, because the chemical effects of cigarettes wear off quickly your sleep will be disrupted because of withdrawal. You may notice this by the need to have a cigarette immediately on waking.

Night Time Tension Anxiety

- **Avoid watching the news** before going to bed.
- **Avoid paying bills** before bed. Avoid checking your financial records or the stock market results.
- **Avoid arguments** before bedtime.
- **Schedule difficult conversations** at least 3 hours before attempting to sleep. Try to reach a resolution of a discussion/argument before bed.
- **Do NOT watch the clock.**

Changing my Thoughts about Sleep

- **Use positive self-talk phrases.** Repeat a positive affirmation regarding sleep 10 times in a row and do this 3x/day.
- **Excessive worrying** about insomnia may be more detrimental to health than the sleep loss itself.
- **Avoid negative judgements** about the fact that you are unable to sleep.
- **Keep a sleep diary** to help you be more realistic and affirm that you have good nights.
- **Write down negative** automatic thoughts and challenge them. The most likely consequence of not getting enough sleep is that you will feel tired and irritable. Although these are uncomfortable inconveniences, they are not catastrophic.
- **Don't panic about a poor night's sleep.** This makes your sleeping worse. Trust in your body wisdom that you are getting enough sleep.

- **Instead of trying to fall asleep**, do the opposite and try to not fall asleep. Taking the pressure/stress off could help you to sleep.

Sleep Planning and Bedroom Preparation

- **Keep your bed for sleeping.** If you are used to watching TV or doing work in bed, you may find it harder to relax and to think of the bed as a place to sleep.
- **Schedule your sleep** to get 7 to 9 hours in your bed or what your own sleep requirements are.
- **Keep a regular routine** to train you biological clock. Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day. The body needs to know when it is supposed to sleep.
- **Only go to bed when sleepy.** Lying in bed trying to go to sleep will increase your sleep frustration.
- **Have a bedtime ritual.** Brushing teeth, washing face, getting pyjamas on, having a snack etc. help to signal the body and brain that it is time to sleep.
- **Take a hot bath, shower or sauna before bed.** When the body temperature is raised in the late evening, it will fall at bedtime, facilitating sleep.
- **Remove clock from view.** It will contribute to worrying if you constantly stare at it.
- **Avoid getting in bed after midnight** as late hour sleep is not as helpful as earlier hour sleep.
- **Get to bed as early as possible** and at the same time each night. Following a regular routine is beneficial for our adrenal glands (our “stress” gland).
- **Avoid late afternoon or evening naps.** We only need a certain amount of sleep and this takes away from the amount of hours you will need.
- **Consider reading** a good neutral book under low light or other wind-blown activities like listening to relaxing music.
- If you are having trouble falling asleep or wake up in the middle of the night and can’t return to sleep, **don’t lie in bed more than 30 minutes** trying to fall asleep. Utilize sleep techniques such as reading with low light, word puzzles, knitting, progressive relaxation, journaling or meditation.

Foods

- **Eat a light snack with tryptophan.** High protein snacks like turkey, fish, poultry, eggs, soy protein are the best as they can provide tryptophan needed to produce melatonin and serotonin.

- **Avoid foods that you may be sensitive to.** This is particularly true for dairy and wheat products, as they may have an effect on sleep (i.e. can cause sleep apnea, excess congestion, gastrointestinal upset, gas and other symptoms).
- **Avoid sugars/carbohydrates and grains** before bed (i.e. sweets, bread, cereal, crackers, etc.). Such foods will raise your blood sugar levels and inhibit sleep. Later, when blood sugar levels drop too low (hypoglycemia), you might wake up and not be able to fall back asleep.

Challenging Common Worries about Sleep

- Thinking that insomnia is only the result of external causes is a self-defeating as you may overlook what you can do to get a better sleep.
- Regardless of how your insomnia started, how you think and behave can contribute to prolonging insomnia. As you control your thoughts, you can improve sleep patterns. Discuss cognitive behavioural therapy with Dr. Bjorndal.

Thought: “After a poor night’s sleep, I know I won’t be able to function the next day.”

- Do you always experience daytime impairments after a poor night’s sleep?
- Do you always experience daytime difficulties with the same intensity after a poor night of sleep?
- Is it possible that other factors might also be causing the above problems?

Thought: “I must get 8 hours of sleep every night”.

- Sleep needs vary widely among individuals
- Avoid placing undue pressure on yourself to achieve standards that you will not always meet. It will only increase anxiety and perpetuate insomnia.
- Remember that too much sleep may be a waste of time! Some very productive people are short sleepers.

Thought: “I should fall asleep in minutes because my spouse does”

- In normal individuals, there is a wide variation in how long it takes people to fall asleep, how often they wake up and in the quality of their sleep; therefore, if it takes you longer, do not dwell on this pattern.

Bedroom Air Quality & Environment

- **Use an air purifier/filter** (i.e. Hepa) to clean the air in your bedroom. Use the filter on a low setting if the noise is soothing. Otherwise use on a medium setting for 4-6 hours during the day.
- **Clean the vents** in your house once a year and change your furnace filters every three months.
- **Avoid toxic glues** or noxious odours.
- **Improve nasal congestion** by dusting your room. Consider using a saline spray, breathe easy strips or warming socks hydrotherapy.
- **Dress** comfortably for bed.
- **Wear socks to bed.** Feet have poor circulation and as a result, they often feel cold before the rest of the body. A study has shown that wearing socks to bed reduces night walking.
- **Ensure the temperature** in your bedroom is not too hot or too cold.
- **Check your bedroom for electromagnetic fields (EMF)** which disrupt the pineal gland and the production of melatonin and serotonin, and may have other negative effects as well. Use a gauss meter to measure EMF's. One doctor even recommends that people pull their circuit breaker before bed to kill all power in the house (Dr. Herbert Ross, author of "Sleep Disorders.")
- **Keep your head at least 5 feet away from electric fields.** Possible sources of electrical fields include: electrical outlets, clock radios, stereos, computers and monitors. Consider moving these devices or moving your bed or your position in the bed.
- **Avoid water beds** or electric blankets/mattresses because of the excessive heat and EMF's.
- **Do alternate nostril breathing** 10 minutes before bed which helps to restore the circadian rhythm and increases the amount of melatonin produced by the body at night.
- **Do guided imagery** or progressive/systematic relaxation if you are not asleep in 30 minutes after going to bed.
- **Do not expect immediate results** and be patient. Your disturbed sleep patterns have taken time to learn and it may take a while to unlearn them.

Light & Noise

- **Turn down the light** in the bathroom and in the rooms you are in 15 minutes before going to bed. Decrease the light in your bedroom by using a dimmer or a lower wattage bulb in the lamp beside your bed.
- **Use black-out blinds** or consider eye shades to cover your eyes from any light. This prevents early waking due to sunlight.
- **Decrease the irritating noise** in your space by closing windows, using a white noise generator or a HEPA air filter etc. Turn off or remove any appliances or clocks that make noise.
- **Eliminate loud noise** with earplugs (we recommend: Ohropax brand) or soft music.
- **Use an alarm clock without lights** and is not loud/alarming. It is very stressful on the body to be woken up suddenly. If you are getting enough sleep, alarm clocks are not necessary. Consider the use of a dawn simulator which gradually turns the light on to full intensity after 45 minutes.

Early Awakening

- If you awaken early because of recurrent thoughts try writing them in a journal either before bed, upon waking or first thing in the morning. Seek counselling as you might be stressed or depressed. If you are depressed, sleep improves when it is treated.

Bedding & Pillows

- Consider replacing your pillows with hypoallergenic pillows 2 times a year. Use ultrafine allergy pillows and mattress covers.
- Use a body pillow to hug and put between your knees to align your back and shoulders at night.
- Roll back wards at a slight angle onto a body pillow if you have hip bursitis.

Supplements & Medications

- Take calcium/magnesium supplements at bedtime
- Discuss natural sleep aids with your naturopathic doctor.
- Reduce or avoid as many medications as possible. Many medications, both prescription and over the counter, may have a negative effect on sleep.

