

Strategies to Promote a Good Night's Sleep

Here are ways to help your body take on positive sleep habits:

1. Wake up at the same time every morning (even on weekends).

- Initially it may be difficult, but it is essential for developing a regular sleep rhythm

2. Do not go to bed until you feel sleepy.

- Once your body gets into a pattern, it will let you know when it needs sleep

3. Do not “try” to fall asleep.

- It is stressful and self-defeating to force yourself to fall asleep
- Instead, use the “20 minute rule”, allowing yourself only 20 minutes to fall asleep
- If you don't fall asleep in 20 minutes, get out of bed, leave the room and do a low stimulating activity (eg. read a book) until you feel sleepy again, and then go back to bed
- Do not watch the clock for the 20 minutes; instead, ‘guess’ how much time has passed
- Repeat this process until you fall asleep
- The goal is to associate the bed with falling asleep quickly

4. Avoid napping during the day.

- Naps disrupt the normal sleep rhythm, decreasing the quality and quantity of night time sleep

5. Improve your sleep environment.

- Make your environment comfortable: not too cool or warm (ideal temperature is 18° Celsius or 64-66° Fahrenheit), minimize noise and light, and use ear plugs and eye shades as needed
- Use a supportive mattress and pillow
- Find a comfortable position and use pillows for support if needed

6. Avoid caffeine in the evening.

- Caffeine is a stimulant (i.e., promotes wakefulness), increases the rate of urine production, delays sleep onset, and prevents deep sleep and REM sleep, the most restorative phases of sleep

7. Start a regular exercise and activity program.

- People who exercise regularly (30 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 times per week) sleep more deeply than those who do not exercise regularly
- Avoid exercise late in the day (i.e., after 8pm) as it over-stimulates the nervous system, making it difficult to wind down by bed-time

8. Save your bedroom for sleep (and sex) only.

- Do not use your bedroom as an “activity centre”
- Associate your bedroom with sleepiness, not wakefulness

9. Leave your day's dilemma's at the door.

- If something is troubling you, write out an action plan to deal with it the next day
- Be very detailed: write down the problem and a list of what you need to do to solve it

10. Incorporate relaxation techniques.

- Examples include: deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, visualization, warm baths, and relaxing music
- Mentally “scan” your body to identify areas of tension. Practice some breathing or other form of relaxation to release that tension. Say to yourself, “relax and let go” as you exhale. You can also practise this if you find yourself awake in the middle of the night