

Tips for a Better Night's Sleep

Carrie Lippincott, OTR/L

Avoid stimulating activities before bed:

- Limit strenuous activity after dinner or within 3 hours of bed. Do your exercise in the morning or afternoon. Yoga and weight training are an exception, as they can actually help the body to relax.
- Limit your TV, computer or screen time for the last hour or two before you go to bed. The blue light from screens decreases melatonin levels. Keep TVs out of the bedroom.
- Stop all work related activities at least two hours before bed.
- Before bed, make a list of your worries and leave them at the bedroom door. Plan on addressing them tomorrow and put them out of mind for the night.

Consider your room:

- Make your room as dark as possible. Turn your alarm clock away from you. Red clock faces will not interfere with sleep as much as clock faces emitting blue light.
- Once you settle into bed, use low lighting, avoid turning on the overhead light.
- Keep your bedroom cool but not cold. Your bedroom should be no more than 70 degrees. Use blankets for warmth, instead of turning up the heater. Cooler, comfortable rooms lead to better sleep.
- Consider using a white-noise machine, if you are awakened by noises. You can also try sleeping with ear plugs.
- If you have to get up to go to the bathroom, keep the lights off. If you need light, use a night light with a red bulb. Red light exposure at night has less of a negative effect.
- Use your bedroom for sleeping, not watching TV, chatting on the phone, or snacking.

Set the basic schedule of your day:

- Get to bed before 11:00. Our adrenal glands recharge or recover the most between the hours of 11:00 PM and 1:00 AM. If you are used to staying up too late, try shifting your bedtime back 15 minutes earlier each week until you reach your desired bedtime.
 - Sleep between 7 and 9 hours a night. Consistently sleeping less than 6 hours and more than 9 hours a night increases your risk of cancer according to the American Cancer Society.
 - Get into the sunlight in the morning. The light is a key signal to help wake your brain, so your melatonin levels drop back to daytime levels. Exposure to light is an easy way to increase your energy for the day.
 - A short nap during the day is generally okay, but if you are sleeping poorly at night, it is best to stop naps until your nighttime sleep improves.
 - If you can't get to sleep, get up, leave the bedroom and do a boring activity until you are tired again, and then return to bed. This also applies for waking up in the middle of the night. If you are not following back asleep, get up. You can't force yourself to sleep.
- **Develop a soothing bedtime routine to ease the transition to sleep.** Some ideas to try:
 - Listen to calming music
 - Do deep breathing
 - Try drinking some warm milk,

- Read a Bible passage.
- Rock in a rocking chair, the calming effects from rocking last about 3 hours.
- Aromatherapy may help. Try putting lavender, vanilla, orange or geranium oil on your pillow or on a cotton ball placed inside your pillow case. Experiment and see what works for you.
- Take a warm bath or shower before bed. You can also try putting the scents in your bath water. Epsom salts in the bath, help muscles and nerves to relax, along with detoxifying the body. Soak for at least 20 minutes. Also try taking a hot bath, 2 hours before bedtime, keeping the water hot for at least 25 minutes to stimulate the drop in body temperature that makes one tired.

Consider what you eat and drink:

- Avoid caffeine any time through the day. Caffeine effects last for 4 to 5 hours, and longer in some people. If you must drink caffeine, limit it to the morning. Don't forget, chocolate also contains caffeine.
- Avoid large, heavy meals late in the day, along with staying away from spicy or exotic foods.
- Avoid bedtime snacks that are high in sugar or simple carbohydrates. These foods cause a short-lived spike in blood sugar, followed by a crash later. When the crash happens, the body releases adrenaline, glucagon, cortisol and growth hormones to regulate the blood sugar level. These hormones can stimulate the brain. Try to avoid eating within 2 hours of bed. If you do need a snack, reach for a protein, high fiber snack such as almonds or half an apple. Protein provides tryptophan, which the body converts to melatonin and serotonin.
- Try to avoid fluids in the 2 hour period before bed to avoid getting up during the night to go to the bathroom.
- Limit your consumption of alcohol. It can make you feel drowsy, but the effect does not last. The body metabolizes the alcohol as you sleep which can actually cause you to wake up or prevent deeper sleep, or cause a shorter sleep period. One glass of wine with dinner won't affect your sleep. It takes 90 minutes to metabolize 1 ounce of alcohol. Drink any more than this and your sleep will most likely be impacted.

References

Gentry, Tony, Loveland, Jeff , Sleep Essential to Living Life to Its Fullest, *OT Practice*, January 21, 2113, 9-13 AOTA

Phillips, Teisha, Sleep Disorders, 80-109, *CME Resource/NetcCE*, April 2014, Vol. 13, No. 16

Turner, Natasha (2009) *The Hormone Diet*, 153-163, Canada, Random House

You must not rely on the information on this handout as an alternative to medical advice from your doctor or other professional healthcare provider. If you have any specific questions about any medical matter you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider.