

Sleep Hygiene Guidelines to Improve your Sleep Behavior

1. **NO CAFFEINE:** No caffeine 6-8 hours before bedtime

Caffeine disturbs sleep even without a noticeable stimulation effect and individuals with insomnia are often more sensitive to these effects. Caffeine is found in items such as coffee, tea, soda, chocolate, and over-the-counter medications (e.g., Excedrin).

2. **AVOID NICOTINE:** Avoid nicotine before bedtime

Nicotine is a stimulant. It is a myth that smoking helps you “relax.” As nicotine builds in the system it has an effect similar to caffeine. **DO NOT** smoke to get yourself back to sleep.

3. **AVOID ALCOHOL:** Avoid alcohol after dinner

Alcohol often promotes the onset of sleep, but as alcohol is metabolized sleep becomes disturbed and fragmented. Do not use alcohol as a sleep aid.

4. **NO SLEEPING PILLS:** Sleep medications are effective only temporarily

Sleep medications lose their effectiveness if taken regularly for more than 2-4 weeks, and can make sleep problems worse as medication withdrawal can lead to an insomnia rebound.

5. **REGULAR EXERCISE:** Preferably each day

Exercise can aid sleep, although the positive effect often takes several weeks to become noticeable. Do not exercise within 2 hours of bedtime because it may lead to physical and mental activation and interfere with falling asleep.

6. **BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT:** Moderate temp, quiet, dark and comfortable

Extremes of heat or cold can disrupt sleep. Noises can be masked with white noise (such as the noise of a fan) or with earplugs. Bedrooms may be darkened with black-out shades or sleep masks can be worn. Position clocks out-of-sight since clock-watching can increase worry about the effects of lack of sleep. Be sure your mattress is not too soft or too firm and that your pillow is the right height and firmness.

7. **EATING**

You should avoid heavy meals close to bedtime and foods that may contain caffeine. Do not go to bed too hungry or too full. Avoid snacks in the middle of the night because awakening may become associated with hunger. A light bedtime snack may help in promoting sleep.

SLEEP HYGIENE (CONT.)

July, 2021

8. AVOID NAPS

The sleep you obtain during the day takes away from your sleep needed at night resulting in lighter, more restless sleep, difficulty falling asleep or early morning awakening. If you must nap, keep it brief, and try to schedule it before 3:00 pm. It is best to set an alarm to ensure you don't sleep more than 15-30 minutes.

9. UNWIND

Allow yourself at least an hour before bedtime to wind down. The brain is not a light switch that you can instantly cut on and off. Most of us cannot expect to go full speed till 10:00 pm then fall peacefully to sleep at 10:30 pm. Take a hot bath, read a novel, watch some TV, or have a pleasant talk with your spouse or kids. Find what works for you and make it your routine before bed. Be sure not to struggle with a problem, get into an argument before bed or anything else that increases mental activation.

10. REGULAR SLEEP SCHEDULE

Spending excessive time in bed has two negative consequences: (1) you begin to associate your bedroom with arousal and frustration and (2) your normal sleep cycle gets disrupted. Many people think that they are getting rest when staying in bed even when they can't sleep, however, this is actually not helpful. Get out of bed at the same time each morning, weekdays and weekends. You probably will be tempted to stay in bed if you did not sleep well, but try to maintain a consistent schedule. This guideline is designed to regulate your internal biological clock and reset your sleep-wake rhythm.

11. DIFFICULTY FALLING ASLEEP

Delay bedtime until you feel sleepy, even if it's later than your normal bedtime. If you don't fall asleep with 15-20 minutes, get out of bed and engage in a boring or relaxing activity. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed. Repeat this step as often as necessary until you fall asleep and get up at your originally planned wake time.

It usually takes 2-3 months for a sleep problem to get totally better, but most people see improvements within 2-3 weeks if they consistently follow the guidelines.

Primary Care Behavioral Health