

Health and well-being

FACT SHEET

TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP

Do not nap during the day

If you are having trouble sleeping at night, try not to nap during the day because you will throw off your body clock and make it even more difficult to sleep at night. If you are feeling especially tired, and feel as if you absolutely must nap, be sure to sleep for less than 30 minutes, early in the day.

Limit caffeine and alcohol

Avoid drinking caffeinated or alcoholic beverages for several hours before bedtime. Although alcohol may initially act as a sedative, it can interrupt normal sleep patterns.

Don't smoke

Nicotine is a stimulant and can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. Many over-the-counter and prescription drugs disrupt sleep.

Expose yourself to bright light/sunlight soon after awakening

This will help to regulate your body's natural biological clock. Likewise, try to keep your bedroom dark while you are sleeping so that the light will not interfere with your rest.

Exercise early in the day

Twenty to thirty minutes of exercise every day can help you sleep, but be sure to exercise in the morning or afternoon. Exercise stimulates the body and aerobic activity before bedtime may make falling asleep more difficult.

Check your iron level

Iron-deficient women tend to have more problems sleeping so if your blood is iron poor, a supplement might help your health and your ability to sleep.

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Keep a regular schedule

Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time everyday, even on the weekends. Keeping a regular schedule will help your body expect sleep at the same time each day. Don't oversleep to make up for a poor night's sleep - doing that for even a couple of days can reset your body clock and make it hard for you to get to sleep at night.

Incorporate bedtime rituals

Listening to soft music, sipping a cup of herbal tea, etc., cues your body that it's time to slow down and begin to prepare for sleep.

Relax for a while before going to bed

Spending quiet time can make falling asleep easier. This may include meditation, relaxation and/or breathing exercises, or taking a warm bath. Try listening to recorded relaxation or guided imagery programs.

Don't eat a large, heavy meal before bed

This can cause indigestion and interfere with your normal sleep cycle. Drinking too much fluid before bed can cause you to get up to urinate. Try to eat your dinner at least two hours before bedtime.

Bedtime snacks can help

An amino acid called tryptophan, found in milk, turkey, and peanuts, helps the brain produce serotonin, a chemical that helps you relax. Try drinking warm milk or eat a slice of toast with peanut butter or a bowl of cereal before bedtime. Plus, the warmth may temporarily increase your body temperature and the subsequent drop may hasten sleep.

Jot down all of your concerns and worries

Anxiety excites the nervous system, so your brain sends messages to the adrenal glands, making you more alert. Write down your worries and possible solutions before you go to bed, so you don't need to ruminate in the middle of the night. A journal or "to do" list may be very helpful in letting you put away these concerns until the next day when you are fresh.

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Avoid "over-the-counter" sleep aids

Also make sure that your prescribed medications do not cause insomnia. There is little evidence that supplements and other over-the-counter "sleep aids" are effective. In some cases, there are safety concerns. Antihistamine sleep aids, in particular, have a long duration of action and can cause daytime drowsiness. Always talk to your doctor or healthcare practitioner about your concerns.