

Sleep Hygiene: Basic Guidelines

What is a good sleep environment?

- Dark. Avoid lights, including night-lights. Keep the windows covered with blinds or curtains.
- Cool. Keep the temperature of your sleep environment cool enough to necessitate blankets for warmth.
- Quiet. Falling asleep and staying asleep is much easier if your environment is quiet. Use earplugs or a "white noise machine" if you cannot control the noise level in your sleep environment.
- Comfortable. Make sure you are sleeping on a comfortable mattress. A good mattress will support your back and will not leave you stiff and sore in the morning.

What is a good night of sleep?

- An uninterrupted sleep
- A refreshing sleep
- A deep sleep
- A length of time that works for you personally (the average adult needs 7.5 to 8 hours per night).

What will stop you from having a good night sleep?

- Consuming alcohol before bed. Alcohol may make it easier to fall asleep but it is at the cost of quality. Alcohol fragments your sleep, so you will not feel well rested even after a full night in dreamland.
- Certain medications. Some medications have side effects associated with insomnia. This is also the case for certain herbal remedies. Make sure to read the accompanying informational material and to consult your doctor or pharmacist!

What should you do to fall asleep easily?

- Have a bedtime ritual. This sends a cue to your body that it is time to settle down and fall asleep. A ritual does not have to be a long process and can be as simple as brushing your teeth

- and reading for 15 minutes.
- Keep a regular sleeping pattern. This allows your body's biological clock to take care of your ability to fall asleep and insures that you will be alert during the appropriate times of the day. One way to set your biological clock is to sit in the direct sun for 15 minutes right after you wake up in the morning. This prompts your body to tune in to the time of day.
 - Have a light snack before bed. This will let you sleep soundly though the night without waking up from hunger pangs. Be careful though, eating a heavy meal before going to bed will make it difficult to fall asleep.
 - Unwind earlier in the evening. Take the time early in the evening to relax your body and mind. Falling asleep can be almost impossible if your mind is racing-working through problems, weighing decisions and reviewing the day past or upcoming. A calm, clear mind is necessary for a relaxed body.
 - Take a warm bath before going to bed. Warm baths raise your body's temperature. After the bath your body cools off and this cooling is what makes you sleepy.

What will impede the transition to sleep?

- Staying up too late. By staying up to late you are liable to get a "second wind" which will make it difficult for you to fall asleep even if it is late.
- Eating a large or heavy meal before bed. Heartburn, indigestion, and the need to urinate are counterproductive and end up disturbing your sleep.
- Doing things other than sleeping in bed (watching TV, working, etc.). If you engage in activities other than sleep or sex in bed, your brain will cease to recognize cues indicating that bed is the place for sleep.
- Having caffeine before bed. Caffeine is a stimulant that keeps you awake.
- Cigarette smoking. The nicotine found in cigarettes is a stimulant and will interfere with your body's ability to fall asleep.
- Exercising directly before bedtime. Exercise is healthy and can be very helpful if you do it several hours before going to sleep. Don't exercise just before bedtime since the natural high

produced from exercise will inhibit your ability to fall asleep immediately.

- Forcing yourself to fall asleep. If you can't fall asleep after 30 minutes, it is wise to get up and do something that is not stimulating. Forcing yourself to lie there will only frustrate you and take you even farther from your goal of sleep.
- Daytime naps. Avoid daytime naps because they stagger your body's biological rhythm. By taking naps, you might not be tired at bedtime and this will encourage you to stay up later. If you don't go to bed at a reasonable hour, you might feel tired the next day and opt for another daytime nap, which establishes a vicious cycle. If napping is necessary, sleep for less than 1 hour before 3 pm.

<http://www.queendom.com/articles/mentalhealth/sleepguide.html>