

# Suggestions for Better Sleep

Achieving better sleep can lead to many health improvements. This list of suggestions for better sleep is not meant to be implemented in its entirety. Instead, pick three to four changes to implement to improve sleep quality.

## MINIMIZE OR AVOID STIMULANTS

- Avoid alcohol (wine, beer, and hard liquor) within 3 hours of bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine-containing beverages or foods after 2 pm; if sensitive to caffeine, avoid it after 12 noon. (These items include Pepsi, Coke, Mountain Dew; tea, coffee, lattes, and chocolate; coffee- or espresso-containing ice creams or desserts). Read the labels of everything you eat and drink!
- Avoid Sudafed or other decongestant cold medicines at night.
- Some medications may have stimulating effects. Consult your pharmacist and doctor to determine whether any of them might be contributing to sleep problems. Do not discontinue them without permission from your doctor.
- Complete any aerobic exercise before 6 pm (or at least 3 hours before bedtime).

## NIGHTTIME TENSION AND ANXIETY

- Avoid anxiety-provoking activities close to bedtime.
- Avoid watching the news before going to bed.
- Avoid reading stimulating, exciting materials in bed.
- Avoid paying bills before bed.
- Avoid checking your financial reports or the stock market before bedtime.
- Avoid arguments before bedtime.
- Try to achieve some action plan or resolution of a discussion or argument before trying to go to sleep.
- Avoid repeated negative judgments about the fact that you are unable to sleep.
- Use positive self-talk phrases regarding your ability to relax and fall asleep: "I can fall asleep." "I can relax."
- Try writing in your journal any disturbing thoughts that are running through your mind.
- Schedule a time within the next few days to deal with whatever is troubling you. If you are having trouble managing your concerns for more than a few weeks, consult your healthcare provider for treatment suggestions or a counseling/therapy referral.
- There are many relaxing yoga or stress reducing mindful breathing CDs or DVDs available to help you find a relaxing bedtime ritual that works for you.

## SLEEP PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Plan your sleep by putting it into your schedule; plan for 8½ to 9 hours in bed.
- As much as possible, go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day. This will help train your biological clock.
- Begin prepping for bedtime 30 minutes before getting in bed.
- Avoid getting in bed after 11 pm as late-hour sleep is not as helpful as earlier sleep.
- Avoid late afternoon or evening naps.
- Avoid naps longer than 45 minutes unless you are sick or quite sleep deprived.
- Avoid large meals or spicy foods before bed.
- Finish all eating 3 hours prior to going to sleep.
- Avoid drinking more than 4–8 ounces of fluid before going to bed.
- Take a hot salt/soda aromatherapy bath—raising your body temperature before sleep helps induce sleep. A hot bath also relaxes muscles and reduces tension. Add 1–2 cups Epson salts (magnesium sulfate absorbed through the skin is very relaxing), ½ to 1 cup baking soda (sodium bicarbonate which is alkalizing to a stressed out acidic body) and 10 drops lavender oil (helps lower cortisol levels).

## STRATEGIES TO USE WITH TROUBLE FALLING ASLEEP OR STAYING ASLEEP

- Don't stay in bed more than 20–30 minutes trying to fall asleep. Leave your bedroom and go to a relaxing room other than the bedroom and read or do a relaxation technique (e.g., meditation).
- Consider reading a good neutral book under low light to help with falling asleep.
- If using a tablet or phone for reading, make sure they are in the nighttime setting and brightness is as low as possible.
- If using a light, don't use a table lamp. Instead use a HUD light or other small light that only illuminates the reading material.
- If you awaken early because of light, put a dark covering over your eyes.
- If you awaken early because of recurrent thoughts, try writing them in a journal. If this does not help, consider counseling. Depression might be a factor.

## LIGHT, NOISE, TEMPERATURE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- Turn down the light in the bathroom and in rooms you are in 15 minutes before going to bed.
- Decrease the light in your bedroom by using a dimmer or a reading light with a dimmer.
- Consider using amber glasses for at least 30 minutes before bedtime to reduce light exposure.
- Use dark window shades or consider a set of eye shades or a black covering for your eyes when trying to sleep or if you awaken too early because of light.
- Decrease irritating noises in your space by closing windows, using ear plugs, or using a white noise generator or a HEPA air filter.
- Turn off or remove any appliances or clocks that make noise.
- Make sure your sleeping area is the correct temperature range (not too hot or too cold).
- Avoid sleeping near electromagnetic fields. Try to have your head at least 8 feet away from electromagnetic fields, if possible. Possible sources of electromagnetic fields include: electrical outlets, clock radios, stereos, cell phones, computers and monitors. Consider moving these devices or moving your bed or your position in the bed. Consider using a Tri Field or other meter to test for these fields.
- Avoid sleeping with an electric blanket on. Instead, turn on blanket when prepping for bedtime then turn it off when getting into bed.

## BEDDING AND PILLOWS

- Consider replacing your pillows with hypoallergenic pillows. Use ultrafine allergy pillow and mattress covers.
- Consider using a “side sleeper” pillow for under your neck when sleeping on your side
- Consider using a body pillow to hug and put between your knees to align your back and shoulders at night.
- Roll backwards at a slight angle onto a body pillow if you have hip bursitis or shoulder pain.
- Sleep on the highest quality bed linens you can afford.

## SUPPLEMENTS AND LIGHT THERAPY

- Consider taking supplements to aid your sleep.
  - Melatonin – 1–5 mg to fall asleep and/or 5–20 mg time released melatonin to stay asleep
  - 5-HTP – 100–200 mg 1 hour before bedtime
  - Taurine – 500–2000 mg 1 hour before bedtime
  - Magnesium – 200–400 mg is a typical dose.
  - To decrease nighttime cortisol or stress consider using ashwaganda, phosphorylated serine, lactium casein decapeptide, L-theanine or other calming herbs.
  - Establish an evening herbal tea habit, such as lemon balm and passion flower, to support relaxation and sleep onset.
- Consider ½ hour exposure to a blue or 10,000 lux bright light (first thing in the morning) if you are going to bed too late and want to shift to an earlier bedtime.

