

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep is critical in keeping us well and functioning effectively. It affects learning, memory, judgment, mood, immune functioning, circulation, growth, metabolism, and organs like our heart and lungs. It gives us time to rest and repair, and allows our brain to clear out toxins.

As we all know, sleep can be complicated for many of us. Also, our experience of sleep varies at different stages of the life span. Improving sleep hygiene - or how we take care of ourselves by preparing our bodies and brains for sleep - can make a big difference in the quality and quantity of our sleep. We all have ideas about what would work to improve sleep, but those things often contradict with the other things we'd rather be doing, like spending time with family, friends, our pets, enjoying food, electronics, media, exercise, and more. However, the impact of sleep deprivation is so high, it's worth it to try to make this a priority in our lives.

Here are some ideas for planning your nightly routine in a way that brings you restful, lengthy sleep; enough to actually restore. Not all of these issues will work for you or feel like a good fit. Try the things that you will actually commit to practicing consistently. To reap the benefits, you will have to do it enough to build a habit, so please practice patience with the process. You may need to tweak your plan as you go along, but the benefits of your commitment to this will be life changing!

NOTE: if you have sleep difficulties that could indicate a medical issue (problems with breathing, blood pressure, heart rate, unexplained pain, etc.), please consult with your physician about a thorough medical evaluation to rule out something more serious. Unsure? Ask your physician.



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Planning

Based on your experiences, decide on a consistent bedtime routine and sleep / wake cycle. Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Try out the routine for a week or so, assess what does and does not work, and alter accordingly.

"Rise and Shine" and "Enjoy your Day"

- first thing in the morning, get brief exposure to sunlight
- before you get out of bed, do a few minutes of deep breathing, meditation, prayer, stretching, or anything else to increase alertness and assist with waking
- set your intentions for the day
- practice good nutrition (and eat breakfast!)
- stay hydrated during the day
- practice self-compassion
- be productive and engaged at work
- set healthy boundaries
- exercise / enjoy social / family connection
- play / do fun things / be creative
- limit daytime naps to under 30 minutes and not too late in the day

Pre-Bedtime Routine ("Wind-Down Time")

ideally begin 2-3 hours before sleep

- avoid doing work-oriented tasks
- do some calming movements (yoga, stretching, tai chi, qigong, etc.)
- develop a calming self-care routine (meditation, visualization, or a relaxation exercise, etc.)
- stop using caffeine by mid-afternoon
- stop using nicotine as early as possible
- avoid alcohol (or stop use early)
- avoid heavy meals or exercise
- reduce fluid intake
- refrain from difficult, conflictual interactions
- refrain from thinking about stressful things (perhaps write them out)
- avoid disruptive media and using electronics
- lower the lights in the house
- speak with a quiet, calming tone
- put your attention on calming soothing activities
- do something "bonding" with loved ones

Time to "Surrender to Sleep"

- follow your sleep / wake cycle times
- use a good mattress and pillows (under your knees or other parts, too, if needed)
- use bed only for sleep and sex
- relaxation or deep breathing exercise
- keep pets out of your room, or at least off your bed
- use ear plugs or another noise cancelling option
- use eye shades / sleep mask
- If you wake during the night, no clock checking, turning on lights, electronics, reading, etc. Try a relaxation or deep breathing exercise. If you still are not asleep after 20 to 30 minutes, it may be best to get out of bed, but only engage in calming things somewhere else in the house, so your brain does not associate the bed with anxious alertness, sleeplessness, etc. Have calming, soothing activities ready for these possibilities.

Create a Comfortable Bedroom Environment (your "Sleep Haven")

- welcoming, calm, uncluttered bedroom space
- display favorite things that help you feel peaceful and supported
- room temperature between 60-70°F
- darken the room (use blackout curtains if needed)
- no TV / electronics (blue light)
- keep your room quiet (use a "white noise" machine or play calming music)
- use a calming scent, perhaps a diffuser
- avoid stimulants (nicotine / caffeine)
- gentle movement, yoga, or stretching
- meditation, relaxation, or visualization exercise



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