

Sleep Habits

When you're tired, it seems as if you should be able to fall asleep easily. But for many people, getting to sleep and staying asleep is difficult. The recommendations below can help you.

Stick to a schedule throughout the day

Keeping a regular schedule throughout the day can help your body know when it's time to sleep.

- **Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time** each day — even on weekends and days off work.
- **Resist the urge to sleep in**, even if you didn't sleep well.
- **Keep a regular schedule** for meals, medications, and other activities. Exercise at the same time each day, but don't exercise hard within 3 hours of going to bed.
- **Try not to nap** during the day. If you're really sleepy, take just one nap, and do it before 3 pm.
- **Create a bedtime routine** you can go through for about 30 minutes before going to bed. This might include quiet activities such as reading or watching TV for a few minutes, listening to quiet music, or taking a bath.



Watch what you eat and drink late in the day

What you consume in the afternoon and evening can affect your sleep.

- Don't drink **caffeine** (as in coffee or soda) within 6 hours of going to bed. Caffeine is a stimulant and can keep you awake.
- Don't use **nicotine** (as in cigarettes and other tobacco products) close to bedtime or during the night. Nicotine is also a stimulant.
- Eat a **light snack** before bed so you don't go to bed hungry. But don't eat a large meal just before bed.
- Don't drink **alcohol** within six hours of going to bed. (Never drink alcohol while taking sleeping pills or other medications.)
- Don't drink too much of anything late in the day. If you have to wake up to use the toilet you may have trouble falling back asleep.

Make your bedroom a room for sleep

If you use your bedroom just for sleeping, your mind will start to associate your bedroom with sleep. So even when you're not thinking about it, being in bed should make you sleepy.

- Use your bedroom just for sleeping. Watch TV, read, and do your paperwork in another room.
- Don't fall asleep in a room other than your bedroom.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet. Put telephones, noisy clocks, and the television in another room.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark. Get curtains that block outdoor light, and cover lighted clocks or other lights in the room.
- Make sure your room is a comfortable temperature. Keep it a little cool, but keep an extra blanket nearby if you need it.
- Make sure your bed and pillow are comfortable. You may want to try out different kinds of pillows.

If you can't get to sleep, get up

Don't lie in bed awake. Being frustrated can make it even harder to get back to sleep.

- If you can't get to sleep within 15 minutes, get out of bed. Go do a quiet activity in another room. If worries come to mind, write them down in a journal and close it until morning.
- Go back to bed only when you're sleepy. If you still can't sleep, leave your bedroom again until you're sleepy.

Be careful about taking over-the-counter sleep medications

Try to improve your sleep habits without taking medications. If you do try over-the-counter sleep medications, don't rely on them for long periods of time.

Do NOT take sleeping medications if you:

- Drink alcohol or use drugs that make you drowsy. They may cause harmful interactions.
- Are taking any prescription pain medications.
- Are elderly, or need to get up in the night. You may be more likely to fall.
- Need to operate heavy machinery soon after waking. You may be more likely to have an accident.
- Have sleep apnea. The medications may increase your breathing trouble.
- Have breathing problems, glaucoma, chronic bronchitis, an enlarged prostate gland, or are pregnant or nursing.

A doctor can offer more help

Consider talking with a doctor if:

- You snore loudly and have moments of not breathing during sleep
- Your sleep problems are getting in the way of your daily living
- Your sleep problems last more than a month

You may have a recognized sleep disorder (such as sleep apnea) that requires medical attention.