

GUIDELINES FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

The following guidelines are recommended to help you improve both the quality and amount of your sleep.

- 1 **Exercise** during the day, preferably in the late afternoon before dinner. Aerobic exercise (20 minutes or more) is better/ but 45 minutes to an hour of brisk walking will suffice.
- 2 Go to bed and especially get up at **regular times**, even if you're tired in the morning. Don't vary your time of going to bed or getting up. Getting up a half hour earlier in the morning may help you get to sleep that night.
3. Don't try to make yourself sleep. If you're unable to fall asleep after 20-30 minutes in bed/ leave your bed, engage in some relaxing activity (such as watching TV, sitting in a chair and listening to a relaxation tape or having a cup of herb tea), and do not return to bed until you're sleepy.
- 4 **Avoid heavy meals** before bedtime, or going to bed hungry (a small snack before bedtime may be helpful).
- 5 **Avoid heavy alcohol** consumption before bedtime (for some people, a small glass of wine before bed may help).
- 6 **Turn yourself down during the last hour or two of the day.** Avoid vigorous physical or mental activity, emotional upsets, and so on.
- 7 **Reduce caffeine and nicotine** consumption as much as possible. If you must have coffee, have it only in the morning.
8. Instead of prescription drugs, try natural supplements that foster sleep. **Valerian** tea can be very useful and there is research to show that any non-caffeine **warm drink** e.g. warm milk, herb tea or water will aid sleep. The herb kava in higher doses can induce sleep for many people. GABA 200-500 mg before bedtime or in the middle of the night, may also be helpful. (GABA is available in many health-food stores.) Safe forms of, L-tryptophan (taken off the market in the U.S. in 1989) are available by prescription. Tryptophan is a potent sedative when combined with a carbohydrate snack. In recent years, many people have been using the hormone melatonin to help them get to sleep. Herbal tinctures containing valerian, hops, passionflower, or skullcap may also be of help. Finally, you may find a Chinese herbal preparation, "Anrrien Pieri," to be of assistance. Take four tablets at bedtime. As with any drugs or medicinal herbs, it's important to consult a knowledgeable practitioner to make sure that a given supplement or herb is safe and appropriate for you. This is especially important if you take other medications. See chapter 16, the section "Supplements for Anxiety," for further information on natural sedatives.

9. **Develop a sleep ritual** before bedtime. This is some activity you do every night before you get into bed. A hot shower or bath before bedtime may help you relax.
10. For relaxing tense muscles or a racing mind, use **deep relaxation techniques** such as progressive muscle relaxation or guided visualization on tape (see Chapters 4 and 12). Get an auto-reverse recorder that can play a tape in a continuous loop.
11. **Eliminate nonsleep activities in bed** (such as work or reading) to strengthen the association between bed and sleeping—unless these activities are part of your sleep ritual.
12. Avoid napping during the day.
13. Try varying the firmness of your mattress by buying a new one or adding a board underneath, a featherbed, or an "egg-crate" foam pad.
14. Reduce noise through the use of **ear plugs** or a noise-masking machine.
15. Keep your **room temperature** between 16 and 20 degrees. **Too warm or cold** a room tends to interfere with sleep. Use fans for a hot room if air conditioning is unavailable.
16. If your partner snores, kicks, or tosses and turns, have separate beds at whatever distance is mutually acceptable. Sometimes saying their first name will change the depth of their sleep so that snoring stops. Or get them to sleep e.g. on their side.
17. **Don't let yourself be afraid of insomnia.** Work on *accepting* those nights when you don't sleep as well. You can still function the next day, even if you had only a couple of hours of sleep. The less you fight, resist, or fear sleeplessness, the more it will tend to go away.
18. If pain is causing sleeplessness, analgesics are more appropriate than sleeping pills.
19. Sex (when physically and emotionally satisfying) helps sleep.
20. If you suspect that emotional problems are causing sleeplessness, consult a competent psychotherapist. Depression and anxiety disorders commonly produce insomnia. Getting more emotional support and expressing your feelings often will help you sleep.

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