

IMPROVING SLEEP

1. **Eat regular meals every day.** Regular meals are signals to the biological clock about time of day. Do not eat a big meal within about three hours of bedtime.
2. **Make the last hour before bed a “wind-down” time. Have a light carbohydrate snack (e.g. crackers, bread, cereal) during this time.** If you have things on your mind, write them down and then engage in relaxing and pleasant activities. A light snack serves as a final signal to the biological clock about bedtime and prevents night time hunger. If you get up during the night, do not consume any food.
3. **Do not consume more than 8-10 oz of liquids in the evening.** A full or semi-full bladder can contribute to night time awakenings. Restrict liquid intake in the evening after dinner and go to the restroom right before bed.
4. **Do not consume caffeinated products (e.g. coffee, tea, many sodas, chocolate) in the evening.** Caffeine makes it difficult to fall asleep and disrupts your sleep during the night. Eliminate caffeine within 8 hours of bedtime. Even decaf coffee or tea has small amounts of caffeine.
5. **Do not use alcohol to help you sleep or consume alcohol too close to bedtime.** Although alcohol may help you fall asleep more easily, it disrupts your sleep during the night by causing frequent awakenings. Alcohol should not be consumed within 3 hours of bedtime.
6. **Smoking disrupts your sleep.** If you smoke, do not smoke too close to bedtime and do not smoke during the night if you are awake.
7. **Do not nap during the day.** Napping makes it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep during the night.
8. **Exercise regularly, but do not engage in activities that raise body temperature (e.g. warm bath) within 3 hours of bedtime.** Regular exercise can improve sleep quality, but exercising or having a warm bath too close to bedtime can disrupt sleep onset. The best time to exercise to help sleep is in the late afternoon or early evening. Warm baths can be taken in the evening but not within 3 hours of going to bed.
9. **Make sure that your bed is comfortable.** Mattress firmness is a personal preference, but your bed should offer you sufficient support for sleep.
10. **The temperature of your bedroom should be comfortable and on the cool side (around 65°F).** Extreme temperatures at either end of the range will disrupt sleep.
11. **Make sure that your bedroom is dark and quiet.** Darkness signals to the biological clock that it is night time. Creating constant background noise in the sleep environment (e.g. a fan, humidifier) will eliminate unexpected sounds that would otherwise wake you up. Earplugs are another option if noises are waking you. Turn alarm clocks away from you and set the display to a dim setting if possible.
12. **Spend time outside in the light each day.** Exposure to sunlight helps to set the biological clock.
13. **Only use sleeping pills on a short-term basis if at all.** Sleeping pills should not be used chronically. Many are addictive and have undesirable side effects. Check with your physician before using any medication.
14. **Don’t watch the clock!** Set an alarm and don’t look at the clock again during the night. Watching the clock can make you more anxious and make it more difficult to fall asleep or fall back asleep.