**Sleep hygiene advice – 15 Top Tips to help you sleep better**

1. **Keep a regular sleep schedule** by going to bed and getting up at the same time during weekdays and weekends. This is important and will help develop a regular sleep-wake (circadian) rhythm.
2. **Avoid napping during the day.** Napping decreases ‘Sleep Debt’ and sleep drive that are necessary for easy onset of sleep. However, in chronic insomnia it can be helpful to have one or two short naps (no more than 20-30 minutes) to reduce daytime symptoms and anxiety.
3. **Increase light exposure during the day** but make sure the bedroom is as dark as it can be at night. Blackout blinds can help. This helps to establish a normal circadian rhythm.
4. **The bed is for sleeping or intimacy.** Try not to watch TV or read in bed as this will cause you to associate the bed with wakefulness.
5. **Minimise unwanted noise** such as traffic, aeroplanes or a snoring partner. Buy some ear plugs. They won’t block all environmental noise but they should dull it enough for you to sleep. If you have a snoring partner seek some professional help.
6. **Minimise your use of electronic devices with screens** (eg. mobile phone, computer, TV) close to bedtime. These emit high amounts of blue light which affects the levels of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin. You can block blue light emissions on some devices via the device settings or using Apps.

1. **Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature that is comfortable for you.** The ideal temperature is around 18 degrees. If you are too hot, wear loose cotton clothing. If you are too cold wear bed socks.
2. **Don’t over eat before bed** as indigestion can be painful and keep you awake. Avoid eating a lot of sugary or fatty foods if you are tired, these can cause stimulation followed by energy crashes. If you are hungry in the middle of the night, a light carbohydrate or protein based snack is best.
3. **Avoid alcohol and caffeinated drinks for at least 4 hours before bed.** Although alcohol will make you fall asleep quickly, it results in poor quality sleep and frequent wakening during the night making you feel un-refreshed in the morning. **Caffeine is a stimulant** and will prevent you from falling asleep. Similarly, **tobacco is a stimulant**. Smokers can wake several times during the night with cigarette cravings.
4. **Exercise regularly during the day**, and at least 6 hours before bed, ideally between 4-7pm. Exercise increases metabolism and core body temperature. The fall of core body temperature during the evening promotes sleep. Do not exercise just before bedtime as this releases endorphins which may cause difficulty initiating sleep. It has been shown that insomniacs do not decrease their metabolism or core body temperature as much as normal sleepers do.
5. **A warm bath an hour before bedtime** also helps to raise core body temperature like exercise but is not as effective as exercise.
6. **Don’t stay in bed awake for more than 20 minutes.** You cannot make yourself fall asleep, so don’t try and force it as this will cause anxiety that will keep you awake. If you can’t sleep don’t be tempted to look at the clock as this will cause an emotional reaction which will further hinder sleep onset, you will worry that it is either earlier or later than you thought. Get out of bed and sit in a chair or go to another dimly lit room. Try to relax or distract yourself, reading or watching something dull can help but avoid computers/internet as this will stimulate you. Return to bed when you feel sleepy.
7. **Anxiety and depression** can prevent you from sleeping well and are amongst the commonest causes of sleep disturbance. Try to make a conscious effort to think and talk about your worries and concerns during the day. It can be helpful to write these thoughts down on paper along with suggestions for how to deal with each of them.
8. **Avoid sleeping pills and medications** if possible as they are not very effective in the long-term. Many drugs carry serious risks of dependency, tolerance and rebound insomnia. Some medications can be used safely on a short-term basis. Anti-histamines and herbal products can be bought over-the-counter
9. **Try relaxation and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** that incorporates a multimodal approach combining a number of behavioural interventions with cognitive therapy. Your GP can refer you for CBT or you can try accessing online programmes such as [www.sleepio.com](http://www.sleepio.com). Another useful technique is mindfulness (non-religious meditation) which can be accessed at [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com).

**Points to remember:**

* Sleep patterns change throughout our lives. We need less sleep as we get older.
* We often feel that we are awake or haven’t slept when in fact we have. Evidence shows that people are more likely to report being awake when they have actually been in the early stages of sleep or dream (REM) sleep.
* Missing a few nights sleep rarely causes any significant impact on daily functioning except when performing boring or monotonous tasks. The effects can, however, be significant when sleep is disturbed over a longer period of time.
* Relaxation is very helpful even if you don’t fall asleep so try to focus on feeling relaxed and comfortable in bed.
* Sleep problems often take some time to start improving so persevere and don’t get too discouraged as the anxiety will make the problem worse.
* See your GP if you continue to experience difficulty or if you think you may have another underlying medical problem.