

Tips to help you sleep better



Adapted from www.getselfhelp.co.uk

A lot of research has shown that the following tips can be long-term solutions for helping you sleep better.

Many medications are used to treat insomnia. However, these generally only tend to be effective in the short-term, and then lose any positive effect. Ongoing use of sleeping pills can lead to dependence on the medication, poorer quality sleep (you may sleep longer but not wake refreshed), and stop you developing good sleep habits. Talk to your health professional about what is right for you. The following tips and strategies can make a difference whether you are using medication or not.

Creating a space that promotes sleep

1. The right space: It is important for your sleep that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable. A cooler room with enough blankets to keep warm improves sleep quality. Make sure you have curtains or an eye-mask to block out extra light and earplugs to deal with extra noise. Feeling safe in your room is also important.

2. Bed is for sleeping: Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so your body comes to associate bed with sleep. If you use your bed as a place where you watch TV, eat, read, study, work or pay bills, it will be hard to switch your mind off and sleep there.

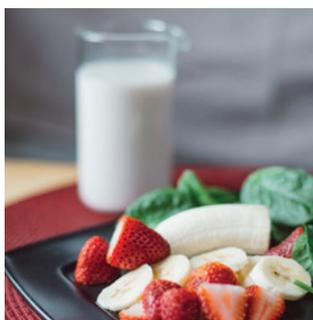


Tips to help you sleep better



Daytime activities that help you to sleep

- 1. Exercise:** Regular exercise helps good sleep. However, try not to do strenuous exercise in the four hours before bedtime. Morning exercise particularly helps your sleep at night.
- 2. Eat right:** A healthy balanced diet helps you sleep well, but timing is important. A heavy meal soon before bed can disrupt sleep. Some people find an empty stomach at bedtime disrupts their sleep, so a light snack can be helpful. Warm milk or a banana is often recommended as a pre-bed snack because they are rich in tryptophan—a natural sleep inducer.
- 3. No naps:** Avoid taking naps during the day, to make sure you are tired at bedtime. If you must take a nap, make sure it is less than an hour and before 3pm.
- 4. Keep your daytime routine the same:** Even if you have a bad night's sleep and are tired it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities the same as you planned. Don't avoid activities because you feel tired because this can make the insomnia worse.



Tips to help you sleep better



Leading up to bedtime

1. Get regular: Aim to go to bed and get up at around the same time every day, even on days off from work. This regular rhythm will train your body to have a better sleep cycle and will help you to feel better.

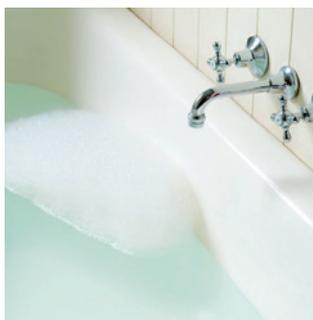
2. Sleep rituals: You can develop your own rituals of things that help your body prepare to go to sleep.

Some ideas:

- ▶ Make sure you do relaxing things for the last hour or so before bed. Don't work up to bedtime or involve yourself in other stimulating activities.
- ▶ Have a hot bath 1-2 hours before bedtime. It raises your body temperature, and you will naturally feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again.
- ▶ Do relaxing stretches or breathing exercises for 15 minutes before bed each night.
- ▶ Sit calmly with a cup of caffeine-free tea before bed.

3. Avoid caffeine and nicotine: It is best to avoid consuming caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, cola drinks, energy drinks, chocolate, and some medications) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These substances make it more difficult to go to sleep and may decrease the quality of the sleep you get.

4. Avoid alcohol: It is also good to avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. Many people think alcohol relaxes them and helps them get to sleep, but it actually decreases the quality of the sleep you get.



Tips to help you sleep better



During the night

1. Sleep when sleepy: Only try to sleep when you feel tired, rather than spending too much time awake in bed.

2. Get up and try again: If you haven't fallen asleep after about 20 minutes get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy, then return to bed again.

3. No clock-watching: Turn your clock so you can't see it at night. Checking the time during the night causes many people distress which stops them from sleeping properly.



Keeping going

All of these things can help you sleep better, but it does take time to establish a better sleeping pattern.

Don't be discouraged if your sleep pattern takes some days or weeks to change. Keeping on doing these things even if they don't seem to work straight away is very important!