



TIPS FOR — A GOOD — NIGHT'S SLEEP

By Emily Gurnon, contributing writer

Learn the strategies and habits that may help you get the sleep you need.

The amount of sleep you get matters. So does the quality of your sleep. Poor sleep can raise your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Lack of proper sleep can contribute to being overweight or obese. So it's important to do everything you can to get a good night's sleep.

Shape up your habits

Keep a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day, even on weekends. This will help set your body's sleep-wake cycle. Limit caffeine. Caffeine may disturb some people's sleep. Read labels carefully. Caffeine can take up to eight hours to wear off completely. If you're sensitive, limit eating food or drink with caffeine after late afternoon. Some medicines, including some pain relievers, contain caffeine as well.

- **Quit smoking.** Nicotine is a stimulant that may keep you awake and cause lighter sleep overall. Avoid alcohol before bed, if you choose to drink at all. Small amounts of alcohol may be relaxing and help you fall asleep, but it actually interferes with staying asleep.

- **Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime.** Eat dinner early in the evening, at least two hours ahead of bedtime. Avoid rich or spicy foods that may be hard to digest.
- **Get regular exercise.** Exercise is essential for good health and may help you sleep better. But exercising too close to bedtime may make it harder to get to sleep.
- **Avoid naps late in the day.** If you really need to catch a few winks, do it early in the afternoon, and don't sleep for more than 20 minutes.

You will sleep more soundly if you can maintain a comfortable sleeping area. Here are some tips to help you sleep more soundly:

- **Adjust the temperature down.** Most people sleep better in a cool space with good ventilation.
- **Reserve your bedroom for sleep.** Your bedroom should be a place where you go to relax, not work.
- **Avoid the light of TVs and digital screens.** TVs and digital devices light can stimulate your brain — not good if you're trying to get to sleep.
- **Keep it quiet.** Find ways to block out noise. Try using earplugs, a fan or "white noise" device to create soft, soothing sounds.
- **Block out light.** Keep your sleeping space as dark as possible. Try blackout curtains or an eye mask. This can be especially important for night-shift workers.
- **Get a comfortable bed.** Your bed should be large enough for you to roll and stretch. Experiment with different bedding to find what works for you.

If you're still having trouble sleeping after trying these tips, or if you have had sleep problems for two weeks or longer, talk with your doctor.

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