

Sleep Hygiene

A Different Kind of Cleanliness

You have probably heard the terms “insomnia,” “sleep disturbance,” and “sleep health,” but what about sleep hygiene? In this context, “hygiene” refers not so much to cleanliness as it does to the care, intention, and routine of our bedtime process. For example, is putting your phone or tablet down the very last thing you do before rolling over to go to sleep? Do you watch TV right before or in bed? If you work remotely, is your bedroom also your office during the day?

These kinds of activities, while common, are all examples of what experts would call poor sleep hygiene. The blue light which emanates from certain electronic devices can interfere with our body’s natural melatonin production, inhibiting sleep. If a bedroom also doubles as an office during the workday, our brain can come to associate that space with work, and the energy and stressors associated with our jobs, rather than a relaxing environment in which to fall asleep.

Having said that, everyone’s needs are different, and recommendations that may work well for one person may be unhelpful or even counterproductive to someone else. You have to find what works for you, but in general, good sleep hygiene practice looks like:

- Cutting off screen time at least one hour prior to going to sleep
- Establishing a bedtime routine or order, in which you do certain activities (e.g., brush teeth, floss, attend to other personal hygiene matters) to prepare for bed
- Going to bed at roughly the same time each night
- Doing some light reading (of a physical book) and/or breathing exercises if you have trouble falling asleep
- Sleeping at night if possible* (obviously not possible for night shift workers)
- Waking up at roughly the same time each day

Regarding how many hours a day one should sleep, suggestions vary. Again, everyone’s needs are unique, but in general 7 to 9 hours of sleep appears to be a standard recommendation.



*What if you work nights?



The idea that it doesn't matter when you sleep but how much you sleep is generally regarded as a myth by sleep experts. Research indicates that it is best for our bodies to sleep at night so that our internal clocks sync with our environment. However, not all of us have that luxury. For those who work evening and night shifts, there is no option but to sleep during the day. The good news is that, if you must sleep during daylight hours, there are things you can do to enhance the quality of your sleep, such as:

1. Practice the applicable good sleep hygiene tips above (cutting off screen time before bed, establishing a bedtime routine, light reading and/or breathing exercises before bed).
2. Consider using earplugs, a fan or white noise machine, and room-darkening curtains to set the appropriate mood for sleep.
3. Avoid going to bed hungry or overly full.
4. Maintain the same daytime sleeping schedule – if possible, maintain that schedule even on days you do not work (this is not always possible or practical depending on our family and living situations).
5. Avoid naps outside of the designated sleeping period if you can (sometimes naps are necessary if you are not able to get enough sleep during the time designated for sleep).

Anyone who has worked nights knows that, even with the best intentions, sleeping consistently during the day can be difficult, and sometimes impossible. If you find yourself tossing and turning for more than a half hour or so, it might be a good idea to get up and do something relaxing or calming (take a warm bath, read a book) rather than trying to talk yourself into sleeping. Sometimes the urge to sleep presents itself when we don't force it.

Still having trouble falling asleep?

If you've done everything you can on your own to establish good sleeping habits and practice proper sleep hygiene, and you still have difficulties falling asleep, it may be time to reach out for professional assistance. You might consider reaching out to a Ulliance Life Enhancement Coach, who can provide additional tips and techniques for improving your sleep habits. You might look at online applications such as Calm and other digital tools to enhance your sleep. If necessary, physicians can prescribe medication aids to sleep – it is always best to consult your doctor on this kind of support as there can be risks and side effects.

Don't underestimate the value of good sleep! If you've been deprived of sleep for even one day, you know what an impact it can have on your overall mood and mental health. Get the sleep you deserve so that you can be your best self!

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information, call your
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for you & your family.**

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