

Get a Good Night's Sleep

Like eating well and being physically active, getting a good night's sleep is vital to your well-being. Most adults need at least 7-8 hours of sleep daily for best health. School-age children and teens need at least 9 hours of sleep daily. Here are 13 tips you can use to improve your quality of sleep.

1. **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day – even on the weekends.
2. **Exercise is great, but not too late in the day.** Avoid exercising closer than 3 or 4 hours before bedtime.
3. **Avoid caffeine and nicotine.** The stimulating effects of caffeine in coffee, colas, teas, and chocolate can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully. Nicotine is also a stimulant.
4. **Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed.** A “nightcap” might help you get to sleep, but alcohol will keep you in the lighter stages of sleep. Also, you'll tend to wake up in the middle of the night when the sedating effects wear off.
5. **Avoid large meals and beverages late at night.** A large meal can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep. Drinking too many fluids at night can cause you to awaken frequently to urinate.
6. **If possible, avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep.** Some commonly prescribed heart, blood pressure, and asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter and herbal remedies for coughs, colds, or allergies can disrupt sleep patterns.
7. **Don't take naps after 3 p.m.** Naps can boost your brainpower, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night. Also, keep naps to 10-20 minutes.
8. **Relax before bed.** Take time to unwind. Consider making a relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, part of your bedtime ritual.
9. **Take a hot bath before bed.** The drop in body temperature after the bath may help you feel sleepy, and the bath can help relax you.
10. **Have a good sleeping environment.** Get rid of anything that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or a TV or computer in the bedroom. Also, keeping the temperature in your bedroom on the cool side can help you sleep better.
11. **Have the right sunlight exposure.** Daylight is key to regulating sleep patterns. Try to get outside in natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes each day.
12. **Don't lie awake in bed.** If you find yourself still awake after staying in bed for more than 20 minutes, get up and do some relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.
13. **See a doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping.** If you consistently find yourself feeling tired or not well rested, you might have a sleep disorder. Your doctor or a sleep specialist should be able to help you.

Source:

1. Your guide to healthy sleep. Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.
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