



Having trouble with your sleep?

Try following these 10 top tips for better sleep...

Lying awake at night can feel like a lonely experience, but evidence shows that you are not alone. In fact studies have estimated that around a third of the general population experience symptoms of insomnia. For some these sleep difficulties might be short lasting, but for others they are more persistent and require some extra help. We hope that the following tips will help to get your sleep back on track.

1. CREATE A SLEEP FRIENDLY BEDROOM

Is there anything obvious in the bedroom that is getting in the way of a good night's sleep? Do you need to get your blinds fixed to block out the light? Is your bedroom too hot or too cold? Too noisy? Create a bedroom space that is as dark and comfortable to best promote sleep.

2. WIND DOWN ROUTINE

Take time to prepare your mind and body for winding down before sleep. Set time aside, ideally around 90 minutes, for doing something relaxing and enjoyable. Some ideas might include reading a book, listening to calming music or practicing relaxation exercises. If you find that your mind is racing when you head to bed, you could use part of this time to find a way to close off the day. Perhaps write a diary to take the power out of your thoughts, or make a plan of the things that you would like to do the following day to stop these thoughts popping up when you are in bed.

3. BED IS JUST FOR SLEEP AND INTIMACY

Our minds are clever and create lots of links without us necessarily being aware. This is why it's important to create a strong link between bed and sleep by avoiding using your bed for other activities that aren't sleep, for example checking emails or watching TV.

4. THE QUARTER-OF-AN-HOUR RULE

If you have difficulties sleeping you've probably noticed that you spend lots of time in bed awake. This means that bed might become connected with being awake, frustrated or anxious about sleep. To promote your bed-sleep connection, follow the quarter-of-an-hour rule: if you notice that you aren't asleep within around 15 minutes of going to bed, try getting out of bed, go to another room go through your wind down routine until you are feeling sleepy-tired and ready to return to bed for sleep. Don't clock-watch though; just estimate quarter-of-an-hour!

5. RISE TIME

If sleep is that elusive state that feels unreachable, it can be tempting to try and catch up on lost hours by having a lie in. In fact, this is likely to decrease the likelihood of a good night sleep the following night, because you won't have built up enough 'sleep pressure' throughout the day. Set a regular rise time and see if you can stick to it 7 nights a week. It might be hard work in the short term but will improve your chances of falling asleep each night. To help with getting out of bed at your rise time, plan some things to help get you going; perhaps a lively piece of music, a nice breakfast or a shower.



6. KEEP ACTIVE!

Keeping active can set us up for a good night's sleep, both physically and emotionally. Keep active to tire your body ready for sleep (e.g. walking, yoga, cycling) but try to make sure this isn't too close to bedtime (i.e. within 2 hours of bedtime).

7. CONSIDER WHAT YOU PUT INTO YOUR BODY

You want to give your body the message that the later part of the evening is for switching off. So try to avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine in the hours before bed. Alcohol before bed also impacts on sleep by decreasing sleep quality so you are less likely to wake up feeling rested. Lastly, consider the timing of meals – the purpose of food is to supply energy, so eat at regular times through the day and avoid eating within four hours of bedtime.

8. NATURAL LIGHT - IT'S ALL ABOUT TIMING

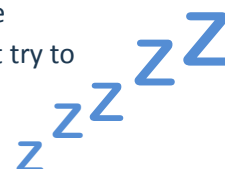
Natural light suppresses the production of melatonin (a hormone associated with sleep). Try to avoid bright light before bedtime to promote melatonin production. Conversely, try to expose yourself to lots of natural daylight when it's time to be awake (particularly early morning). This will help you wake yourself up and get going for the day.

9. SCREENS AND ELECTRICAL DEVICES

Back-lit screens and devices such as many smart phones, TV's or laptops contain a large amount of blue light. This kind of light is the strongest for suppressing melatonin production. Using them last thing at night can therefore disrupt sleep quality. Try to limit your use before bedtime.

10. BE SMART WITH YOUR NAPS

The longer we are awake, the more likely we are to sleep, because our 'sleep pressure' has had time to build up. To increase your chances of drifting off at night try to avoid naps throughout the day. Of course, if you feel dangerously tired, do take a short nap (of around 20 minutes) but try to plan this earlier in the day to allow your sleep pressure to build again afterwards.



This article was written by Dr Bryony Sheaves and Professor Colin Espie at the University of Oxford. To find out more go to www.scni.ndcn.ox.ac.uk

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HOW YOU ARE SLEEPING?

For a short assessment of your sleep you can access the Great British Sleep Survey. The survey will tell you your sleep score and offer you a profile of your sleep:

<http://www.greatbritishsleepsurvey.com>

HOW TO GET MORE HELP WITH YOUR SLEEP

The above tips are advice only and should not be a replacement for comprehensive medical treatment. If you are concerned about your sleep or any other medical problem, please speak to your medical doctor.