

GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Sleep problems are fairly common. In fact, one in four people experience sleep difficulties, which include trouble falling asleep, trouble staying asleep, early morning waking, sleeping too much, or restless or unsatisfying sleep. Getting a good night's sleep can improve your mental well-being and help you to better manage your anxiety. The good news is that there are things you can do to improve your sleep.



TIP: Sleep problems can be the result of various conditions or medical problems. Therefore, it is important to discuss your sleep problems with your doctor.

To improve your sleep, try some of the following strategies:

Create a Comfortable Sleep Environment. If you want to have a good sleep, it helps to create a comfortable sleep environment. Make sure that you have a supportive mattress and fresh, comfortable bedding. Also, try to ensure that your room is not too hot or cold, minimize noise, and block out light.

Relax. Try doing something to relax your body and mind before going to bed. Try taking a hot bath 90 minutes before you plan to go to bed. Or, try a relaxation exercise (see [Calm Breathing](#) and [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)), meditation, or listening to calming music.

Have a Snack. Although a heavy meal late in the evening can disrupt sleep, a healthy light snack in the evening can improve sleep. Try eating light cheese and crackers, turkey, or bananas, or drink a warm glass of milk. Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods.

Get Physical. People who exercise tend to have more restful sleep. Exercising for at least 30 minutes three times a week can improve your sleep. So, get moving! Go for a walk or a run. The best time to exercise is in the late afternoon or early evening. Exercising in the morning, while good for you, won't help with sleep. Exercising less than two hours before bedtime can actually interfere with sleep.

Set a Bedtime Routine. Having a bedtime routine cues your body that it's time to sleep. So, establish a set routine that you follow every night. For example, have a hot bath, put on your pajamas, brush your teeth, and then listen to soft music and read on the couch until you start to feel sleepy and then go to bed.

Establish a Fixed Awakening Time. Try waking up at the same time every day (even on weekends) no matter how well or how poorly you have slept. This way your body will begin to get used to a regular sleep rhythm.

Sleep Only When Sleepy. Don't force yourself into bed at a particular time if you're not feeling sleepy. You'll only lie awake in bed, frustrated that you can't sleep.

Just for Sleeping. Your bed should be used strictly for sleeping (sex is the only exception). Try to avoid reading, watching television, working, or studying in bed, because these activities keep your mind active, which gets in the way of sleep.

Get Out of Bed. If you can't fall asleep after 20 to 30 minutes, get out of bed and do something boring (e.g., read the manual on how to program your clock radio, read the sports section of the newspaper if you're not a sports fan) or try relaxing (e.g., meditate, listen to calm music, have a warm de-caffeinated drink). When you start to feel sleepy, try going back to bed. This strategy can feel like you are making things worse, but if you stick with it, it can really help.

Don't Worry. Leave your worries about work, school, health, relationships, etc. out of the bedroom. Try scheduling a "worry time" earlier in the evening to deal with your worries. If you wake up in the middle of the night worrying, try writing down your worries and tell yourself that you will address them in the morning.



TIP: Worrying about not sleeping doesn't help – it just makes it more likely that you won't sleep. Let go of your belief that you have to get eight hours of sleep or you can't function. Stop looking at the clock and stop trying to make yourself fall sleep. It will happen when it happens.

Avoid Caffeine. Avoid consuming caffeine at least four hours before bedtime. This includes coffee, some teas, soft drinks, and chocolate. Caffeine is a stimulant and it can keep you awake.

Avoid Alcohol. Although you may think that alcohol will help you fall asleep, it interferes with sleep later in the evening. So, try to avoid consuming alcohol at least four hours before bed.

Don't Smoke Before Bed. Try to avoid smoking at least four hours before bedtime as it can interfere with a good night's sleep.

Skip the Nap. Naps can interfere with normal sleep cycles. So, if you're having trouble sleeping, avoid taking naps. That way, your body will be more tired when it's bedtime.

Get Some Natural Light. Try to spend some time outdoors or in natural light every day. Getting some sunlight early in the day can be helpful for setting your body's natural wake and sleep cycle.



Keys to Success:

- **Start Small!** Making small changes can have a large impact on your sleep. Don't try to do everything all at once. Instead, pick one or two strategies and try them consistently. When you're ready, try adding a new strategy. The goal is to slowly start increasing behaviours that can help you sleep, while reducing the things that are interfering with your sleep.
- **Be Consistent.** Pick a strategy and use it consistently. Try to do the same thing every night.
- **Be Patient.** These strategies can take time to improve your sleep. In fact, sometimes things can get worse before they get better. Hang in there and stick with it!
- **Chart Your Progress.** Use the [Sleep Diary](#) form to keep track of the strategies you're using and your weekly progress.