Sleep for Health

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Tips for a Good Night’s Sleep

Learn the strategies and habits that can 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 overweight or obesity. So it is important to do everything you can to ensure restful nights.

You will doze more soundly if you maintain comfortable and calm sleeping quarters and prepare yourself for bedtime. Minor changes to your space and your habits can help you get the sleep you need.

Set the stage for sleep

• Adjust the temperature. Most people get a better night’s sleep in a cooler space with good ventilation. You may need to experiment to find the temperature that’s best for you.

• Reserve your bedroom for sleep and sex. It should be a place where you go to relax. It is not a good place to work or make your errand list. You may have more trouble getting to sleep if you associate your bed with anything stressful or busy.

• Rid the room of TVs and computers. Many people think of television as relaxing, but it actually stimulates your brain – not a good thing if you are trying to get to sleep. Even the light that comes from the television or from a computer screen can interfere with your body clock.

• Keep it quiet. Find ways to block out noise. Try using earplugs. Or use a fan or “white noise” device to create soft, soothing sounds.
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Tips for a Good Night’s Sleep (continued)

• **Block out light.** You want your sleeping space to be as dark as possible. Try blackout curtains or an eye mask. This may be especially important for night-shift workers.

• **Buy 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.

**Shape up your habits**

• **Keep a regular sleep schedule.** Go to bed and get up at about the same time everyday, even on weekends. This will help set your body’s sleep-wake cycle.

• **Limit caffeine.** Caffeine can disrupt sleep many hours after you take it in. Caffeine is not just in coffee and tea but also in some soft drinks, medications, and foods. Read labels carefully. Avoid caffeine after lunch, and cut down on your total daily use if you need to.

• **Don’t smoke near bedtime.** Nicotine is a stimulant that can make it hard to sleep.

• **Don’t drink alcoholic beverages within 6 hours of bedtime.** Alcohol may help you feel relaxed, but it can disturb sleep later in the night.

• **Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime.** Eat dinner early in the evening, and avoid rich or spicy foods that may be hard to digest.

• **Get regular exercise but not within 6 hours of bedtime.** Exercise is essential for good health and may help you sleep better. But exercising late in the day can 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 30 minutes.

If you are still having trouble sleeping after trying these tips, or if you have had sleep problems for 2 weeks or longer, talk with your doctor.

**SOURCES:**

• American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Sleep hygiene – the healthy habits of good sleep. Accessed: 03/03/2011

• Helpguide. How to sleep better: Tips for getting a good night’s sleep. Accessed: 06/07/2011


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Nutrition, Meals and Sleep

Can your eating habits really affect your sleeping habits? Find out here.

About a third of Americans report not getting enough sleep at times. Ten percent or more have chronic insomnia. There are many important sleep hygiene tips, and some involve nutrition and meals. Here are some of them:

**Be consistent.** Space out meals and snacks to prevent excessive hunger and keep energy high.

• Eat breakfast. Try eggs, peanut butter or avocado on whole-wheat toast, oatmeal topped with nuts and low-fat milk or cottage cheese and fruit.

• For lunch, a salad with grilled chicken or shrimp, a turkey sandwich on whole-wheat bread or a bean soup would all be good choices.

• Include an afternoon snack if dinner is more than four hours away. Protein-carbohydrate combos may include fruit and a handful of nuts, a rice cake with peanut butter or whole-grain crackers with low-fat cheese.
Avoid heavy meals late at night. Eating a large meal soon before bed can interfere with a restful sleep.

• You want your body to be resting while sleeping, not busy digesting your last meal.

• In addition, lying down with a full stomach encourages acids and gastric juices to flow up into the esophagus. That may cause heartburn in some people.

Nix the caffeine if you are sensitive to it. Any food or beverage with caffeine may disturb sleep, but this is not true for everyone.

• If you are sensitive to caffeine, avoid it in the afternoon and evening. Remember that caffeine can be found in chocolate, tea and some sodas and medications. There is even a small amount of caffeine left in decaffeinated coffee.

Avoid alcohol in the evening if you choose to drink at all. Though small amounts of alcohol may help you fall asleep (and may be relaxing), it actually interferes with staying asleep.

Don’t drink fluids too close to bedtime. If the need to urinate wakes you up in the middle of the night, limit liquids of any kind prior to bedtime.

SOURCES:
• Helpguide.com. How to sleep better: Tips for getting a good night’s sleep. Accessed: 01/02/2013
• Harvard School of Public Health. Healthy eating plate. Accessed: 01/02/2013
• National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Your guide to healthy sleep. Accessed: 01/02/2013

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What to Know About Sleep Apnea

Poor sleep and groggy days could be due to sleep apnea. Learn about symptoms and why it’s important to diagnose and treat sleep apnea.

Many of the 2 to 4 percent of adults with sleep apnea don’t know they have it. They go for years feeling unrested, often until a bed partner complains. The symptoms of sleep apnea – loud snoring, snorting, and gasping for air – are more likely to trouble one’s bed partner. But the dangers are real. Don’t ignore sleep apnea. Untreated, sleep apnea can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Daytime drowsiness can also affect your quality of life, your work performance and it can cause traffic accidents.

What is sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder in which there are repeated pauses in breathing or shallow breathing during sleep. There are two types:

• Obstructive sleep apnea. This is the most common type. Soft tissue in the back of the mouth relaxes and blocks the airway during sleep. This type is common in adults who are overweight, but it can also be seen in children with large tonsils.

• Central sleep apnea. The other type is central sleep apnea. With this, the area of the brain that controls respiration does not send the correct signals to the breathing muscles during sleep.

Obstructive and central sleep apnea can occur together.

What are sleep apnea symptoms?

Not all people who snore have sleep apnea, but almost everyone with sleep apnea snores, and usually very loudly. Their breathing stops for several seconds and they switch from deep to light sleep, almost waking up. These breathless pauses can happen from several times a night to as many as 30 times in an hour. This makes sound sleep difficult. But, it’s common for someone
with sleep apnea to be unaware that their sleep was disturbed. In addition to loud snoring and breathless pauses, someone with sleep apnea may also:

- Choke or gasp
- Toss and turn during sleep

Other symptoms include:

- The need to urinate frequently during sleep
- Not feeling rested upon awakening
- Morning headaches
- Falling asleep during the day
- Trouble concentrating

**How is sleep apnea diagnosed?**

To find out if you have sleep apnea, your doctor will first ask about your symptoms, whether you snore, wake up frequently at night, and about how you feel during the day. This may include talking with someone who shares your bed or room.

Based on your history, your doctor may refer you to a sleep specialist. This is usually a neurologist or a pulmonologist (lung specialist) trained to evaluate and treat sleep disorders. The specialist may suggest a sleep study. The most common study for diagnosing sleep apnea is called a polysomnogram. While you sleep, the polysomnogram monitors:

- Vital signs, such as breathing, heart rate and blood pressure
- Brain activity
- Eye movement
- Breathing movement
- The amount of oxygen in your blood

This test is often done at a sleep center, where you spend the night while you are being monitored. A limited study may be done at home using portable equipment.

**How is sleep apnea treated?**

The goal of sleep apnea treatment is to restore normal breathing at night so that you can sleep soundly and feel well-rested during the day. Treatment depends on the severity of your condition and may include:

- **Oral appliances.** Mild sleep apnea can sometimes be treated successfully with an oral device that your dentist or orthodontist can custom fit for you. The device works by adjusting your lower jaw and tongue to keep your throat open while you sleep. It is worn only during sleep. You need routine checkups with your dentist to make sure the mouthpiece fits properly.

- **Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP).** This is a machine that you keep at your bedside. Air flows gently through a tube attached to a face mask that you wear while asleep. The flowing air into the mouth exerts positive pressure that keeps the back of the throat (or airway) open. The device can be adjusted so that you will have the best results.

- **Procedures.** For more severe sleep apnea, several procedures or surgery may help. Surgical therapy may reconstruct or remove structures in the throat, mouth, or nose that block the airway at night. One procedure removes tissue from the back of the mouth. In another, the jaw is moved forward. Removal of tissue can be done with laser or radio frequency energy, but these methods are usually combined with other treatments.
What else do I need to know about sleep apnea?

You can do a number of things on your own:

• **Reach and maintain a healthy weight if you are overweight.** Being overweight or obese often contributes to obstructive sleep apnea. Losing even a small amount of weight can go a long way to relieve sleep apnea.

• **Avoid alcohol and sedating medication.** Drinking alcohol-containing beverages at night and taking sleeping aids can relax the throat and cause snoring.

• **Don’t sleep on your back.** This tends to make sleep apnea worse. Some people ping a tennis ball-filled sock to the back of their nightshirt to keep them from sleeping on their back.

• **Inform any treating doctors about sleep apnea.** Tell your doctor that you have sleep apnea before any procedure that requires general anesthesia. He or she can take extra steps to keep your airway open.

**SOURCES:**


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Relax to Get a Better Night’s Rest  (continued)

The role of relaxation
Imaging studies show that the brain is quite active in people who are having trouble sleeping. When you are feeling stressed, the body naturally releases brain chemicals that prepare you to fight or flee. That’s good in situations where you have to act right away, like when you swerve to avoid a traffic accident. But it’s not so good when you’re trying to rest.

Finding ways to bring your system back into balance can help you sleep better. This means lowering stress hormones, slowing your heart rate and blood pressure, and easing muscle tension. When you’re in a more relaxed state, sleep may be less elusive.

Presleep plan
There are a number of things you can do that may help put you at ease and prepare you for sleep. Some are as simple as unwinding just before bedtime by taking a hot bath or reading a book. Other techniques may take a little more practice. But they are easy to learn. Here are three relaxation techniques:

• **Breathing exercises.** Take a breath and hold it for 5 seconds. Repeat this several times, focusing on the sound of the breath. Or, as an alternative, practice repeatedly inhaling through your nose - enough that your lower abdomen rises - and exhaling through your mouth. While exhaling, contract your abdominal muscles and push out as much air as possible.

• **Progressive muscle relaxation.** Starting with your feet, tense large muscle groups one at a time, holding until you count to 10. Then relax the muscles, noting how the tension flows away as your feet become looser. Slowly work your way up your body.

• **Visualization.** Picture yourself in a peaceful, comfortable setting. Imagine what you would see, hear, smell and feel in this restful place. The more sensory details you can incorporate, the better.

The ABZzz’s of sleep
Relaxation techniques may help you get better sleep and awaken refreshed and ready to start your day. Good “sleep hygiene” can help, too. Here are the basics:

• Keep a regular sleep schedule.

• Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and large meals before bedtime.

• Make your bedroom dark, quiet, and slightly cool.

If you try these techniques and still don’t sleep any better, talk with your doctor.

**SOURCES:**

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