



# GOOD SLEEP HABITS

- Many things can help you have a better night's sleep
- Keep regular times for going to bed and getting up
- Relax for an hour before going to bed
- Avoid going to bed on a full or empty stomach
- If you are not asleep after 20 minutes in bed, go to another room until you feel tired again
- Many poor sleepers spend too long in bed
- Keep distracting things out of the bedroom
- Getting some sunlight during the day
- Most adults of all ages need 7-9 hours of sleep a day
- An evening nap can make it hard to sleep at night

Note: All words that are underlined relate to topics in the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

## 1. What are good sleep habits?

There are many things that can be done to improve sleep. Here are some guidelines for what you should and should not do for a good night's sleep. Many people have trouble with their sleep. If you are one of them, some of these simple things may help.

## 2. What should I do in the evening?

Try to go to bed at the same time each night. The body has an internal clock and hormones that control sleepiness and wakefulness. This clock works best if there is a regular sleep routine. When working well, you will feel sleepy at bed time. Try not to ignore feeling sleepy by staying up, as this is your window of opportunity for sleep. Going to bed too early can also disturb your sleep. Turn off all bright screens (computers, smartphones etc.) 1 to 2 hours prior to bed. It is preferable not to have them in the bedroom. In the hour before going to bed, it is important to have a relaxing sleep routine. Although this will vary from person to person, some things you may find relaxing include a warm bath, reading quietly or a warm milk drink. Going to the toilet before bedtime can reduce the need to get up in the night.

## 3. Are there things that I should not do in the evening?

Caffeine should be avoided for at least four hours before going to bed. This isn't just coffee and tea but also energy drinks, colas and other soft drinks. Smoking also makes it difficult to go to sleep, so there should be no cigarettes before going to bed or during the night. Alcohol will make it harder to stay asleep and makes sleep problems like snoring and sleep apnoea worse as well. Activities that are stimulating should be avoided in the hour before bed. These include moderate exercise, computer games, television and movies as well as important discussions, using social media, working or responding to emails and text messages. Being in brightly lit environments and the blue light of the computer can reduce evening levels of the a sleep-promoting hormone, melatonin. Don't fall asleep on the couch during the evening as it reduces your sleep pressure and makes it harder to fall asleep when you go to bed.

## 4. What about meals and sleep?

It is important to not be hungry at bedtime. But having a full stomach makes it difficult to sleep. The evening meal should be at least two hours before bedtime. Some people find that having a small snack at bedtime helps them to sleep better.



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## 5. How important is my environment?

The bed must be comfortable. Warmth is important, both the temperature of the room and having enough blankets. Having warm hands and feet is essential. The mattress, pillow and blankets should be comfortable for the season. There should be no distractions in the bedroom so preferably, no television, computer, radio and telephone. If there is a clock in the bedroom, it should be covered to avoid watching clock-watching or if light emitting, turned down to low. If possible, don't allow children and pets to be a disturbance.

## 6. What should I do during the day?

One very important thing is to stay out of bed during the day. The bedroom should be used for sleeping and intimacy only. Some people use the bedroom as a living room, where they study, watch television, make phone calls and read books. This will make it harder to sleep. The brain will no longer link the bed with sleep. As a rule, exercise is good for sleep, but not within an hour or two of going to bed. The best times for exercise are in the morning and before the evening meal. Being out in the sun during the day will improve sleep at night. This will help with your [body clock](#) and the [melatonin](#) levels in the body. It is best to be outside in the early part of the day.

## 7. What should I do if I can't get to sleep?

If you are not asleep within 20 to 30 minutes of going to bed you should get up. Sleep is not something you can force. Try sitting in another room, in subdued lighting, quietly reading but not watching TV, or using the smartphone or computer. When you feel tired and sleepy again go back to bed. This helps link bed with sleep in your mind, not with feeling frustrated and not sleeping. Resting is good – it does not have to be sleep. Try not to label yourself as “an insomniac” as this can increase worry and frustration.

## 8. What if you can't shut off your mind?

Some people lie awake in bed at night and cannot switch off their thoughts. If this is a problem, try setting aside a ‘worry time’ during the evening. Use this time to think about what has been happening during the day, make plans and possible solutions. Then don't think about these things until the next day. Keep the hour before bed as your “wind-down” time – develop a routine that prepares your body and mind for sleep. Listen to quiet music or a relaxation app. Remember that we can never shut off our mind. Our thoughts continue all the time, so try to make them calmer thoughts – a favorite holiday place or fantasy. If other thoughts come in, consider them for a moment and then try to gently replace them with calm thoughts.

## 9. Are naps good or bad?

It depends. Remember that the average adult sleeps for between seven and eight hours a day. If you are taking naps without any problems, and they are short naps (around 30 minutes) then this will have an impact on your night time sleep. On the other hand, naps in the evening, or dozing in front of the TV, can make it harder to get to sleep at night.

## 10. What about prescription medicines and sleep?

Some of these will make it easier to get to sleep. But others will keep you awake. It is best to take them only when your doctor or pharmacist says so. Sleeping pills are for short term or intermittent use only, and should only be used under the supervision of your medical practitioner.

## 11. How much sleep do I need?

Most adults need between seven and eight hours sleep each day. Be realistic about your sleep needs. Younger people have different sleep needs. If you are a poor sleeper it is very important you do not spend too long in bed. Spend no more than eight or so hours in your bed. If you spend more time in bed, you will be telling your body that it's OK to drift in and out of sleep all night. Going to bed later at night may be the single best thing to help reduce your wake time during the night in bed.

## 12. How important is a routine?

Try to stick to a good sleep routine. Improved sleep may not happen immediately you adopt new habits, but if good sleep habits are maintained, your sleep will certainly get better. It is not always possible to do the same thing every day, but it should be most days. Different things work for different people. Find what works for you and stick with it. If you try everything and your sleep still doesn't get any better, then see your GP.

## 14. What might your doctor do?

The first thing that your doctor will do is have a talk about your sleep. Depending on what they think the cause is, they might suggest short term treatment (possibly sleeping tablets) or refer you to a sleep specialist.

## Where can I find out more?

See [Insomnia](#).

For information on over 60 different sleep related topics, written by professionals, visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at [www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au). The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.



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