



8 Steps to Better Sleep

1. Reduce tension and stress

Work on being organized & delegate less important tasks; seek social support; make sure you have sufficient pleasant activities and work you really like; don't take your problems to bed: worrying interferes with falling asleep and leads to shallow sleep (see our Worry Tip Sheet for suggestions to decrease worry).

2. Follow the rules of good sleep Cut down the time you spend in bed to only your sleep time (this leads to deeper, better sleep); never force yourself to try to sleep (this just makes the problem worse); let bedtime rituals work for you (i.e., set up a regular bedtime routine); give yourself time to wind down; keep a regular schedule and wake up at the same time every day (this resets your biological clock so that you will fall asleep at a regular time); hide the bedroom clock (e.g., put it under your pillow or across the room; clock watching interferes with falling asleep); don't stay in bed if you can't fall asleep (leave the bedroom and find a nonstimulating activity; return to bed when you are sleepy); avoid excess liquids before bed (to avoid trips to the bathroom during the night); avoid naps (most people sleep better if they don't sleep during the day, although a 20 minute or shorter nap is probably fine); keep your room dark, non-noisy, and a moderate temperature

3. Work on your thoughts about poor sleep. Stop overemphasizing the impact of poor sleep; avoid selective recall ("I never sleep well, when in fact you may sleep ok most of the time); examine unrealistic sleep expectations ("I must sleep 8 hours"); work on your feeling of helplessness about sleep: "What's the worst thing that will happen if I don't sleep...I might not be in the best shape, but it probably won't be a catastrophe")

4. Stay away from caffeine

5. Limit alcohol and/or smoking, especially in the evening Nicotine is a stimulant and will keep you awake; alcohol might help some people fall asleep but leads to awakening in the middle of the night (and trouble falling back asleep)

6. Follow a healthy diet (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, limited fat). Food allergies are a commonly missed cause of sleep problems, even in infants. Make sure you are getting enough B vitamins, Calcium, magnesium, and zinc--all are important for good sleep. Try a carbohydrate before bed, or a protein if you are prone to hypoglycemia.

7. Exercise about 6 hours before going to bed Part of the reason exercise helps with sleep is the way it impacts your body's temperature rhythms, which are closely related to how well you sleep). Walking for 20 minutes is enough. Exercise helps people sleep deeper and fall asleep more easily.

8. Antidepressants may help, even if you aren't depressed. If you have primary insomnia, a very low dose of an antidepressant such as Elavil may help.

Do you have primary insomnia? If one of your childhood memories is sitting up all night because you can't sleep, or if your child has trouble falling asleep, primary insomnia could be the cause. Primary insomnia involves problems falling asleep, awakening too early, and/or having trouble falling back asleep (with no nightmares or sleepwalking). See our Sleep Problems Tip Sheet for other potential causes of sleep problems. One important consideration: People with primary insomnia tend to sleep poorly no matter how well their life is going, and tend to be very sleepy during the day when they sleep poorly.

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