

## Good ZZZZZ's: Tips for Better Sleep

In our busy lives, regular sleep can often be the part of our health that isn't prioritized. This can affect our internal clock and sleep schedules. Sleep is one of the most restorative things we can do for our bodies to manage our daily stress and improve our physical and mental health. Here are some tips for achieving better sleep time.



- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each night, even on the weekends. This can help our bodies create a natural sleep clock and train our brain to know when it is time to slow down.
- Prepare yourself for bedtime. 2-3 hours prior to sleeping, lower the lights in your home, put aside work, arguments and complicated decisions or projects. It will help you begin to turn off the noise of the day and send signals to your brain to begin making melatonin.
- Create quiet time prior to sleeping. Allow your mind and body to wind down and prepare for sleep by; taking a warm bath (you can use lavender or Epsom salts if you wish), meditate, listen to quiet music, have a cup of chamomile tea or warm milk. Even a 10 minute calming routine can help your body be ready.
- Reserve your room for sleep and sex. Don't work in bed or talk on the phone or watch TV. Make your room associated with rest and relaxation. Keep your room cooler. Most people do well with temperature between 68 and 72 degrees.
- Ban blue light from your bedroom. One hour prior to sleep turn off all blue light producers; cell phones, PDAs or clocks. Cover any blue light displays you can't turn off with black tape.
- Don't watch the clock. This can only add to your stress when you are struggling with sleep. Turn the clock away from you; put it in a drawer or under your bed.



- Use white noise to manage outside interruptions. Get a fan or a white noise machine. There are white noise apps available for smart phones.
- A comfortable bed and body position are important. Your pillow should be the right size to support your neck and the way you sleep. Use a pillow between your knees (side sleepers) or under your knees (back sleepers) for back pain.
- Seal your mattress, box springs and pillows with covers to limit allergy attacks and wash bed linens weekly in hot

water.

- Keep the pets off the bed. While pets can be very comforting, they can also disrupt your sleep. It is one more body you are aware of at night. Get them their own "bed" that they can have in your room or elsewhere in the house.
- If you can't stop thinking at night, make a list with a plan on how to address each thing prior to preparing for sleep.
- Exercise regularly as this can help your body manage stress and be ready for sleep. Finish any vigorous exercise 3-4 hours prior to sleep so your body has time to slow down.
- Avoid naps. If you feel you really need to nap, sleep no more than 20 minutes and try to do this more than 8 hours prior to sleeping again. Sometimes it can be helpful to just push through the day no matter how tired you are to get your sleep back on schedule.
- Avoid heavy foods at night as they can make your digestive system work harder. It is helpful for some folks to have a light snack before bed of a complex carbohydrate and dairy such as cereal and milk or cheese and crackers. Finish the snack at least 1 hour before bed.
- Minimize your liquid intake 2 hours prior to bedtime. This helps to eliminate the middle of the night trips to the bathroom. Use a nightlight in the bathroom so that if you do have to get up, you don't need to use the bright light.

- Limit your caffeine intake. Once noon hits, avoid caffeine in drinks and food. Even chocolate and decaf coffee can impact your rest. Read the labels of medication as some pain relievers and diet pills contain caffeine.
- Reduce nicotine. It can be helpful to smoke fewer cigarettes in the four hours before bed.
- Limit alcohol intake. While alcohol can be initially tranquilizing, it can cause more frequent awakenings and create less restful sleep.
- Get into bright light for 5-30 minutes when you first wake up. Light helps to regulate your internal clock.
- Use caution with sleep medication and herbs. Always talk with your doctor about any use of sleep medications as they can be habit forming and should only be used for a short term solution.
- Finally, if you have been struggling with insomnia for more than one month, it is time to see your physician and get assistance with your sleep!

Sleep is important to all the functions of our bodies. In our culture of "success", sleep often gets put down or put on the back burner. Making sleep a priority can improve our overall health and help us do better in our jobs and our personal lives!

Information taken from CONCERN presentation and other sources.