



Snoozing Like a Champ...The Importance of Sleep for a Healthy Life

What happens while we are asleep? Research continues to find more and more important tasks vital to our overall health that our brains and bodies carry out while we sleep. In addition to the risks of being drowsy and the challenge of general fatigue, inadequate sleep increases our susceptibility to viral infections, risk for several chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes, and incidence of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety. Both the quantity and quality of sleep matters, and the message today includes tips you can follow to try and maximize both. If poor sleep continues after making efforts to improve your sleep, discuss with your primary care provider, as referral to a sleep specialist may be needed to check for a sleep disorder.

The following tips are from recommendations made by the National Institutes of Health, with more detailed information available at their website:

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/sleep-health>

Avoid screen time before bed. The bright light from our smartphones, pads and computers disrupt the normal hormonal signaling needed for sleep. Limiting overall daily screen time and using amber-tinted glasses that block blue light can help improve sleep issues, but most importantly, restricting use right before bed can play a key role in helping to fall asleep faster and improve sleep quality. Consider setting a digital curfew one to two hours before bedtime (the earlier, the better).

Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day—even on the weekends.

Exercise is great, but not too late in the day. Try to exercise at least 30 minutes on most days but not later than 2–3 hours before your bedtime.

Avoid caffeine and nicotine. The stimulating effects of caffeine in coffee, colas, certain teas, and chocolate can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully. Nicotine is also a stimulant.

Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed. A “nightcap” might help you get to sleep, but alcohol keeps you in the lighter stages of sleep. You also tend to wake up in the middle of the night when the sedating effects have worn off.

Avoid large meals and beverages late at night. A large meal can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep. Drinking too many fluids at night can cause you to awaken frequently to urinate.

Avoid medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep, if possible. Some commonly prescribed heart, blood pressure, or asthma medications, as well as some over-the-counter and herbal remedies for coughs, colds, or allergies, can disrupt sleep patterns.

Don’t take naps after 3 p.m. Naps can boost your brain power, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night. Also, keep naps to under an hour.

Relax before bed. Take time to unwind. A relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, should be part of your bedtime ritual.

Take a hot bath before bed. The drop in body temperature after the bath may help you feel sleepy, and the bath can help you relax.

Have a good sleeping environment. Get rid of anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed, or a TV or computer in the bedroom. Also, keeping the temperature in your bedroom on the cool side can help you sleep better.

Have the right sunlight exposure. Daylight is key to regulating daily sleep patterns. Try to get outside in natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes each day.

Don’t lie in bed awake. If you find yourself still awake after staying in bed for more than 20 minutes, get up and do some relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.

Wishing you restful sleep and sweet dreams!

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