



## **How to Improve Sleep**

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Sleep is an essential part of life, yet so many of us struggle to get a good night's sleep. It can be hard to get the recommended 7-9 hours each night when our days feel so short and to-do lists are so long. Sleep is crucial to our functioning, impacting every aspect of our physical, mental, and emotional health. We have all had those days where we feel groggy and grumpy after a bad night's sleep, so how can we avoid experiencing this? Here are some tips for improving sleep to ensure you are feeling your best:

- Set aside at least 30 minutes before bedtime to start winding down. Dim the lights, take a warm bath or shower, read or listen to something relaxing. If you're watching TV, put on something calming or funny.
- After getting into bed, try your best to avoid watching any clocks. Often, people stare at the clock worrying about how many hours of sleep they might get and how badly they might feel the next day if they do not get enough sleep. This only adds stress and makes it harder to sleep!
- Use a noise machine, especially if you are a light sleeper, to mute distractions. You may consider using a cell phone application or an online video that simulates a noise machine. For some people, a ceiling fan or oscillating fan may do the trick.
- If you are unable to fall asleep after approximately 20 minutes of trying, get out of bed and do something calming such as reading a book. Get back into bed when you start feeling sleepy. Remind yourself that even if you're not sleeping, keeping your mind and body relaxed can help you recharge for the next day.
- Utilize room-darkening techniques if you struggle to sleep when light comes into your room, especially if your sleep schedule is non-traditional and you sleep during the day. Invest in room-darkening shades or try an eye mask to decrease the light interfering with your sleep.

- Use your bed for sleep only. It can be tempting to do things like watch television, listen to music, play games on your phone, or even work on your laptop while in bed, but these things only provide more distraction and make it more difficult to associate sleep with the bed.
- Try not to take naps. Napping often makes it more difficult to fall asleep later, thus leading to a later bedtime and less sleep if you have to wake up at a certain time. If you feel you must nap, try to keep this as short as possible. Try other relaxation techniques, like meditation or reading, that allow your body the rest you crave but do not interfere with your ability to sleep later on.
- Avoid caffeine as much as possible, especially close to bedtime. If you are a coffee drinker, try to limit coffee to mornings (or whenever is considered morning to you if you are on a non-traditional sleep schedule). Consuming caffeine near bedtime can decrease your body's ability to fall or stay asleep.
- Engage in regular exercise. Exercise is not only beneficial for your health overall, but also greatly impacts our ability to sleep. Try to avoid engaging in exercise close to bedtime though, as this can actually make it more difficult to sleep.

For more tips on getting good sleep, visit the [National Sleep Foundation](#) website. If you continue to struggle with sleep despite your best efforts, talk with your primary care physician. You may also benefit from talking to a psychologist or other mental health professional.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*