

How to Improve Sleep

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Sleep is an essential part of life, yet so many seem to struggle to get a good night's sleep. It can be hard to prioritize sleep - balancing the recommended 7-9 hours each night when our 24-hour days feel so short as it is. Sleep is crucial to our functioning, impacting our cognitive and physical abilities, emotions, and how we feel overall on a daily basis. 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? Below are some tips for improving sleep to ensure you are feeling your best:

1. Sleep should be as effort-free as possible. It is like a finger trap - the more you try to sleep, the less likely sleep becomes. 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. Avoid activities like watching television or using your phone, especially while in bed.
2. 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!
3. 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, or investing in a real noise machine. Even a fan (e.g. ceiling/oscillating) may do the trick.
4. 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 out an eye mask to decrease the light interfering with your sleep.
5. Avoid activities other than sleeping in bed. Your bed should be reserved for sleep and ideally, should act as a cue to your body that it is time to go to sleep. 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.
6. 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.
7. Avoid using substances like caffeine as much as possible, especially closer 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.

8. 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.

If you continue to struggle with sleep and do not see improvements in your sleep despite efforts, you should inform your primary care physician, and you may also benefit from talking to a psychologist or other mental health professional. Many professionals are offering psychotherapy via secure internet video connection at this time. The Pennsylvania Psychological Association can assist you in finding a local psychologist by using the [Psychologist Locator](#). You can also ask your health care professional or a trusted friend to recommend a psychologist or other mental health professional.