

# Sleep Hygiene for Adults

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have normal, quality nighttime sleep and full daytime alertness. The most important sleep hygiene measure is to maintain a regular sleep and wake pattern seven days a week. It is also important to spend an appropriate amount of time in bed, not too little, or too excessive. This may vary by individual; for example, if someone has a problem with daytime sleepiness, they should spend a minimum of eight hours in bed, if they have difficulty sleeping at night, they should limit themselves to 7 hours in bed in order to keep the sleep pattern consolidated. In addition, good sleep hygiene practices include:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Ideally, your schedule will remain the same every night of the week.
- Avoid napping during the day; it can disturb the normal pattern of sleep and wakefulness. Naps decrease the 'Sleep Debt' that is so necessary for easy sleep onset. Each of us needs a certain amount of sleep per 24-hour period. We need that amount, and we don't need more than that. Taking naps, decreases the amount of sleep needed the next night.
- Make sure that the sleep environment is relaxing and set your bedroom thermostat at a comfortable temperature. Generally, a little cooler is better than a little warmer.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol too close to bedtime. While alcohol is well known to speed the onset of sleep, it disrupts sleep in the second half as the body begins to metabolize the alcohol, causing arousal. No caffeine within 3-4 hours before bedtime.
- Exercise can promote good sleep; however, vigorous exercise should be done in the morning or late afternoon but not in the evening. A relaxing exercise, like yoga, can be done before bedtime.
- Eat a light snack but stay away from large meals close to bedtime.
- Ensure adequate exposure to natural light throughout the day. This is particularly important for older people who may not venture outside as frequently as children and adults. Light exposure helps maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine, such as a warm bath, meditation, or a light reading.
- Practice relaxation techniques before bed, such as yoga, deep breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation may help relieve anxiety and reduce muscle tension.
- Associate your bed with sleep. It's not a good idea to use your bed to watch TV, listen to the radio, or read.
- If you don't fall asleep within 15-20 minutes, or if you find that you get up in the middle of night and cannot get back to sleep within 15-20 minutes, then do not remain in the bed "trying hard" to sleep. Get out of bed, meditate, or read, have a light snack, do some quiet activity, or take a bath. Do not perform challenging or engaging activity such as office work, housework, etc. Do not watch television.
- Many medications can cause sleeplessness as a side effect. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if medications you are taking can lead to sleeplessness.
- Melatonin is a hormone naturally produced by the brain that plays a role in sleep. Taking 3mg to 6mg, 30-60 minutes before desired bedtime may help with a disrupted sleep pattern.

**Always follow the advice of your physician and other healthcare professionals.  
The goal is to rediscover how to sleep naturally.**