

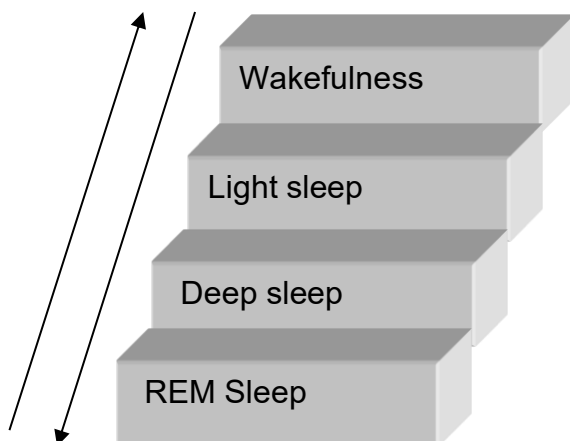


## A good night's sleep

### What Happens When We Sleep?

Falling asleep is a natural, unforced process. Prior to sleep, the body and mind usually “wind down” until sleep eventually occurs. It should normally take 10 - 20 minutes to fall asleep.

There are various stages of sleep including light sleep, deep sleep and dream sleep (also called rapid eye movement (REM) sleep) that usually cycle throughout the night – this pattern is called our “sleep architecture”. Healthy sleep should be restorative and includes various processes such as tissue regeneration, immune system strengthening, metabolism, memory and learning organisation, and other vital functions. Evidence suggests that sufficient deep sleep is most important to feel refreshed the following morning.



### A Good Night's Sleep

A good night's sleep is often taken for granted by those who sleep well. Unfortunately, this is not the case for everyone, and poor sleep can affect a person's quality of life due to daytime sleepiness. The most common cause of sleepiness is simply lack of sleep, although there are several medical conditions that affect sleep quality such as sleep apnoea, restless legs syndrome, and narcolepsy. Many people also suffer from abnormal sleep patterns and insomnia, which can be both caused by a variety of factors that may need addressing in specialist sleep centres. However, taking simple steps to improve sleep hygiene is usually a very good starting point.

### What is “Sleep Hygiene”?

Sleep hygiene refers to the habits of sleep including sleep routine, behaviours prior to sleep, the effects of the sleeping environment, and other influences such as the consumption of stimulants like caffeine.

## Sleep Routine

The sleep-wake cycle is regulated by chemicals (hormones) released by the brain that have the same cycle every day. A random sleep pattern disrupts this process and can lead to daytime sleepiness and feeling wide awake at night.

A regular sleep routine is essential, and it must sometimes be re-established:

- The sleep routine should be **established using a 'wake-up' time**, not a 'bedtime'. Going to bed early and then lying awake will make the problem worse. Decide when you need to be awake and start from there by going to bed 6 – 8 hours before your wake-up time.
- **You may not need 8 hours sleep** – An adult usually needs 6 – 8 hours of sleep, so if you think that you only need 6, you should start by going to bed 6 hours before your wake-up time.
- If you can't get to sleep, you will be very tired the next day but **do not nap** – this will break up the routine. Don't self-medicate with caffeine – this will keep you awake the next night. Be safe, don't drive if you are too tired.
- At some point the enforced sleep deprivation will mean that you do fall asleep. The most important thing though is to **stick to that wake-up time**.
- If you are now sleeping better but feel that you need more sleep, try making bedtime slightly earlier (e.g. add on an extra 20 minutes a few days at a time).

Some nights will be better than others, but it is still important to stick to your routine as closely as possible. The body works best in rhythms and will "get used to" preparing for sleep and getting up at certain times.

## Environment

The bedroom should be a relaxing environment to help the natural process of falling and staying asleep. The following are a list of important factors to create the most beneficial conditions.

- **Light** – The bedroom should be dark (the hormones mentioned above are partly controlled by light). Adequate curtains/blinds or an eye mask are useful in summer.
- **Noise** – The bedroom should be quiet. Use ear plugs if required. Some people use "white noise" to sleep but it is important to ensure this is not linked to any light source.
- **Temperature** – The bedroom should be a comfortable temperature – neither too hot nor too cold.
- **Comfortable** – If you are uncomfortable, your mind will be alert and you won't sleep well. Endure your mattress and bedding provide comfort.
- **Relaxing** – The bedroom should only be for sleep and sexual activity. Don't bring problems into the bedroom – no arguments or important/stressful discussions. The bedroom should also be free from visual stimulation (e.g. TV and computer/phone screens).
- **Clocks** – place clocks away from vision – clock-watching inhibits sleep!

## Lifestyle

Anxiety and stimulation will keep you awake. You need allow sufficient time to ensure that you are relaxed and calm before bed.

- **No screens** for an hour before you go to bed – the light will stimulate you and keep you awake.
- **No work** or other mentally stressful activities for an hour before bed as this will also stimulate your mind and may induce anxiety.

- **Physical Exercise** is important during the day but avoid aerobic exercise for 3 hours before bed (sex doesn't fall into this category and can, of course, occur in the bedroom).
- **A hot bath or shower** 1 – 2 hours before bed can also help some people relax.
- **Reading** for 20 – 30 minutes before bed can lower stress providing the book is not too stimulating (e.g. intense thrillers).

## Diet

A full stomach or bladder, or stimulants such as caffeine and sugar can keep you awake – try to reduce intake when preparing for bed and never go to bed hungry or with a full stomach.

- **Caffeine** from tea, coffee, and energy drinks in modest amounts during the day is unlikely to cause sleeping problems. However, its effects can last a few hours – do not consume caffeine after 4pm at the latest (preferably earlier). If needed, change to decaf.
- **Alcohol** - Although consuming alcohol can make you feel sleepy and relaxed, it is a temporary solution. It can affect sleep quality by increasing awakenings later in the night, often with a full bladder and/or feeling thirsty.
- **Soft drinks** – too much liquid intake prior to bed can also wake you up in need of toilet and break sleep cycle.
- **Sugar** – this is also a stimulant and eating foods high in sugar should be avoided for 2 hours before bed.
- **Nicotine** – this is a stimulant. Avoid nicotine for at least one hour before bed.

## Other Medical Conditions

Other "underlying" medical conditions, such as diabetes, prostate and bladder issues can also increase the need to urinate at night, which interrupts the sleep cycle. It is, therefore, important that you discuss with your doctor to ensure these conditions are controlled as well as possible.

## Break the Cycle of Insomnia

Most people struggle to sleep on occasion, regardless of their sleep hygiene. Once you are aware you're having difficulty, it can play on your mind and worsen anxiety – it is important to break this cycle. Don't lie in bed desperately trying to sleep. If you are still wide awake after 20 – 30 minutes, get up, go to another room and try and do something relaxing, but avoid bright lights or screen time. You can return to bed and attempt to sleep again when feeling tired and ready.

## Summary - Dos and Don'ts

### DO

- ✓ Create and maintain a regular sleep routine 7 days a week (including weekends) with adequate time in bed
- ✓ Ensure the bedroom is comfortable, quiet and relaxing
- ✓ Exercise during the day, but not in the evening
- ✓ Wind down and avoid stimulation in the lead up to bed

## DON'T

- ✗ Do not use your bedroom for anything other than sleep or sexual activity
- ✗ Do not go to bed hungry or within 2-3 hours of eating a large meal or sugary food
- ✗ Do not drink caffeine after 4pm
- ✗ Do not drink excessive alcohol prior to sleep
- ✗ Do not use smoke/vape nicotine for 1 hour prior to bed
- ✗ Do not engage in vigorous exercise within 3 hours of bedtime
- ✗ Do not nap during the day or evening
- ✗ Do not lie in on non-workdays (e.g. weekends)

## Accessibility

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