

SLEEP HYGIENE HANDOUT

We cannot be at our best unless we get good sleep which is important to our overall functioning. Poor sleep compromises one's energy, mood, concentration, memory, ability to accomplish tasks and get along with others. Following are the recommended, necessary hours of sleep per age:

Newborns (0-3 months) need 14-17 hours

Infants (4-11 months) need 12-15 hours

Toddlers (1-2 years) need 11-14 hours

Preschoolers (3-5) need 10-13 hours

School-age children (6-13) need 9-11 hours

Teenagers (14-17) need 8-10 hours (but may sleep 10-14 hours during growth spurts)

Younger adults (18-25) need 7-9 hours

Adults (26-64) need 7-9 hours

Older adults (65+) need 7-8 hours

Following are healthy ways to improve sleep:

1. **HAVE AN APPROPRIATE SLEEP SCHEDULE.** Peoples' natural circadian rhythm (when the body is more ready for sleep and being awake) is basically correlated with darkness and daylight (9 pm to 9 am, although some people are "night owls" and some people are "larks" and may need to shade their sleep schedules accordingly). Going to bed too early can make it difficult to fall asleep which can result in a lot of frustration for people (some parents set too early a sleep schedule for their kids which can contribute to a lot of family discord regarding the issue).
2. **BE CONSISTENT WITH YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE.** Stay within 30 minutes of your designated sleep time so that your body has a good rhythm and is more ready for sleep. Wild swings in a sleep schedule can be the same as jet-lag and result in a frustrating inability to fall asleep on time and difficulty waking up and having enough energy throughout the day. It can take days or over a week to get back on track, and when these patterns happen with kids, it can wreck their school week, week after week. If you need to adjust your sleep schedule, the best way to do it is to wake up half an hour earlier every other day, and you should be able to fall asleep earlier the following day.
3. **NO TV, COMPUTER OR CELL PHONES AT LEAST 30 MINUTES BEFORE BED.** The screens for these devices emit a bright blue light that animates people's brains more than natural sunlight and the activities also animate our brains. It is best to leave your cell phone in another room, or at least turn off the ringer and turn it face down.
4. **NO TV IN THE BEDROOM.** Bedrooms should be for sleep and sex, and research indicates having a TV in a bedroom results in poorer sleep, and, for young people, obesity, lower grades and more behavioral problems. Sleeping with the TV on is probably the worst thing you can do; the light and noise in the room is bound to affect us, and god knows what's on TV at 3 am that is running interference with our subconscious, which has very important work to do at night.
5. **DO NOT WATCH THE EVENING NEWS BEFORE GOING TO BED.** Newscasts are intent on increasing their ratings, and the best way to do that is by trying to scare you into watching with horrible events. This stirs stress up in our brains that even the warm, fuzzy bit about puppies at the end of the newscast can't get rid of.
6. **DO NOT EAT 5-7 HOURS BEFORE BED.** Digestion is a very hard process on the body, and in order for sleep to be fully regenerative, our bodies need to have as little internal

conflict as possible. When we get a full 12-hour fast overnight, we benefit significantly in physically and mentally. Heavy, sugary and spicy foods are particularly problematic. Foods that trigger acid reflux or other physical reactions can be significantly problematic with sleep. Eating daily meals at consistent times also helps with maintain a rhythm for the body.

7. **DO NOT DRINK CAFFEINATED DRINKS AFTER 4-6 HOURS BEFORE BED.** Caffeine ramps up our bodies and usually makes it difficult to fall asleep. Limiting the amount of caffeine throughout the day to no more than the equivalent of 1-2 normal cups of coffee also helps minimize overstimulation.
8. **AVOID SUBSTANCES.** Some people rely on alcohol or marijuana to help themselves get to sleep, but this is not a good strategy as both interfere with natural brain functioning.
9. **DEVELOP A PRE-SLEEP ROUTINE 30 MINUTES BEFORE BED.** We need to calm our body down before bed to help it be more relaxed for better sleep. Light reading, soft music, stretching, deep breathing, caffeine-free teas (camomile), aroma therapy (candles), doodling and progressive muscle relaxation can help settle our body for sleep. Journalling an hour or two before bed can be helpful and gives one enough of a buffer to not interfere with sleep.
10. **MAKE SURE YOU ARE GETTING ENOUGH EXERCISE.** If we don't get enough exercise, we may not be tired enough for sleep and we may have excessive tension in our bodies due to pent-up stress and tension.
11. **SLEEP INTERRUPTION.** If you can't sleep or get back to sleep after 20 minutes, go into another room, practice relaxation techniques for 5-10 minutes, and then get back in bed. Research shows that people get frustrated after 20 minutes of sleeplessness, which makes it really difficult to get back to sleep, and people will often times then be up for hours.
12. **DO NOT LOOK AT THE CLOCK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.** This triggers all kinds of thoughts that almost always impede sleep even more.
13. **LIMIT NAPS TO 10-30 MINUTES.** Napping more than 30 minutes tends to throw off sleep schedules at night.
14. **BEWARE OF RELYING ON SLEEP MEDICATIONS.** These medications are generally only designed for short-term use (no more than 5 weeks) and often have adverse side-effects including "hangover" symptoms of low energy, and "brain fog" that interferes with overall cognitive functioning, and other symptoms throughout the next day. "In April 2019, the Food and Drug Administration added a boxed warning to the prescription insomnia drugs Zolpidem (Ambien, Edluar, Intermezzo and Zolpimist), Zaleplon (Sonata) and Eszopiclone (Lunesta) following reports of injury and death from sleepwalking, sleep-driving and engaging in other hazardous activities while not fully awake. Although extreme reactions to these sleep drugs are thought to be uncommon, they are unpredictable and can be disastrous when they occur. Some have resulted in vehicular fatalities." - "Getting a Good Night's Sleep Without Drugs Alternatives to prescription drugs for insomnia offer better, safer and more long-lasting solutions, experts say." by Jane E. Brody, June 17, 2019 *New York Times Science Section*.

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