

Getting a good night's sleep

Sleep is important for good health, productivity and optimum performance. However, how we manage sleep in the context of our busy lives becomes ever more pressing.

Here are some top tips for a good night's sleep:

1. Eliminate alcohol and caffeine

Try to avoid drinking beverages containing caffeine between three and eight hours before you are going to bed. Caffeine is a stimulant that activates the central nervous system which can cause insomnia during the night. Alcohol can make you feel sleepy, however, it can disrupt your sleep and can keep you from falling into deeper stages of sleep where the body does most of its healing and recharging.

2. Establish a bedtime routine

Taking a warm bath, reading, listening to relaxing music will help to signal to your brain that it is time to sleep. Find something that helps you to relax and try to repeat this routine each night to help you release the day's tensions. It may also be a good idea to remove your television from your bedroom. Watching TV before sleep can be too stimulating to the brain and thus disrupts the function of your pineal gland which means it will take longer to fall asleep.

3. Keep active

Exercise at least 30min every day. It will help you improve your sleep. However, make sure your exercise isn't just before bedtime, as you don't want to have a high adrenaline level when you're trying to drop off.

4. Can't sleep? Get up or practice Progressive Muscular Relaxation

Instead of tossing and turning, get up and do something that relaxes you such as reading, listening to classical music, or some light housework. Go back to bed when you are starting to feel tired again. It is important that you are not worrying too much if you have had a few bad nights. The more you tend to worry about not being able to fall asleep the less likely you are to sleep well.

If you want to try some relaxation techniques, then as you lie in bed try tensing and relaxing your muscles in groups from your toes right up to your forehead. Squeeze each muscle group for a few seconds and then release and relax for 10 seconds before moving on to the next.



5. Get up to enjoy the morning sunlight.

Although it may be very tempting to stay in bed longer, try to get out in the morning sun soon after getting up. The sunlight indicates to your body's natural biological clock that it's time to wake up, and that same clock will then be set to tell your body it's time to go to sleep about 14 to 16 hours later.

6. Dealing with worrying thoughts or remembering important things

If you have a tendency to worry as soon as you shut your eyes, scheduling a 'worry time' earlier in the day may help you to worry less when you are trying to fall asleep. Use 15 minutes to consciously think of all your worries and write them down. Raising your worries to a more conscious level during the day can keep them in their place.

If you are trying to fall asleep and you remember something important that you forgot to do during the day or if you have some ideas or insights that keep you awake, rather than trying to remember, try to take notes on a pad of paper that you keep beside the bed. A few keywords on paper might be sufficient. This method will help you to feel calmer and it will be easier for you to drift off to sleep.

7. Lights out and sensible temperature

Ensure that your bedroom is completely dark. Also ensure that there is as little light as possible in the bathroom if you get up during the night. As soon as you switch on a bright light your body will cease the production of melatonin which induces sleep.

Ensure that the temperature in your bedroom does not exceed 21 C (70F). Research suggests that a hot sleeping environment is not conducive to a good night's sleep.

Sweet dreams!

Article written by Judy Leicht, a Registered Counselling Psychologist at the Craigie Partnership.

We hope you will find these tips to be helpful. If you would like to make an appointment with Judy Leicht or one of our team then contact the Craigie Partnership on 0131 215 1066 or email info@craigiepartnership.co.uk



This article is part of a series of self-help articles written by Psychologists at the Craigie Partnership. The full series includes:

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Confidence & Self-Esteem
- CVs & Interviews
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