Six Steps to Better Sleep

While you cannot control every factor that influences your sleep, you can adopt sound sleep habits that may help you get a better night's rest.

1. **Stick to a sleep schedule** – Go to bed and rise at the same time every day. Try to limit the difference in your sleep schedule on weeknights and weekends to no more than one hour. Being consistent reinforces your body's sleep-wake cycle. If you don't fall asleep within about 20 minutes, leave your bedroom and do something relaxing, such as reading or listening to soothing music. Go back to bed when you're tired.

2. **Be mindful of your meals and consumption before bedtime** – Don't go to bed hungry or stuffed. Avoid heavy or large meals within a couple of hours of bedtime, and avoid consuming nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol for several hours before bedtime—if at all. The stimulating effects of nicotine and caffeine can wreak havoc on quality sleep, and though alcohol might make you feel sleepy, it can disrupt sleep later in the night.

3. **Create a restful environment** – The ideal room for sleeping is typically cool, dark, and quiet. Exposure to light may make it more challenging to fall asleep. Avoid prolonged use of light-emitting screens just before bedtime. Consider using room-darkening shades, earplugs, a fan, or other devices to create an environment that suits your needs. Doing calming activities before bedtime, such as taking a bath or using relaxation techniques, may also promote better sleep.

4. **Limit daytime naps** – Long daytime naps can interfere with nighttime sleep. If you choose to nap, limit yourself to 30 minutes and avoid doing so late in the day. If you work nights, however, you might need to nap late in the day before work to help make up your sleep debt.

5. **Include physical activity in your daily routine** – Regular physical activity can promote better sleep. However, avoid being active too close to bedtime.

6. **Manage stress** - Try to resolve your worries or concerns before bedtime. Jot down what's on your mind and then set it aside for tomorrow. Getting organized, setting priorities, and delegating tasks earlier in the day may help, and practicing meditation or mindfulness throughout the day and/or before bedtime may also ease anxiety.

Nearly everyone has an occasional sleepless night, but if you often have trouble sleeping, contact your primary care provider. Identifying and treating any underlying sleep disorders is important for your physical health, mental well-being, and safety.

Source: Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.org)

Total health

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