

TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Set a schedule:

Go to bed at a set time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Disrupting this schedule might lead to insomnia. "Sleeping in" on weekends also makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because it resets your sleep cycle for a late awakening.

Exercise:

Try to exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day. Daily exercise often helps people sleep, although a workout soon before bedtime may interfere with sleep. For maximum benefit, try to get your exercise about 5 to 6 hours before going to bed.

Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol:

Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, which acts as a stimulant and keeps people awake. Sources of caffeine include coffee, chocolate, soft drinks, non-herbal teas, diet drugs, and some pain relievers. Smokers tend to sleep very lightly and often wake up in the early morning due to nicotine withdrawal. Alcohol may help you get to sleep but it can interfere with deep sleep.

Relax before bed:

A warm bath, reading, or another relaxing routine can make it easier to fall asleep. You can train yourself to associate certain restful activities with sleep and make them a part of your bedtime routine.

Don't lie in bed awake:

If you can't get to sleep, don't just lie in bed. Do something else, like reading, watching television, or listening to music, until you feel tired. The anxiety of being unable to fall asleep can actually contribute to insomnia.

Control your room temperature:

Maintain a comfortable temperature in the bedroom. Extreme temperatures may disrupt sleep or prevent you from falling asleep.

How Much Sleep Do We Need?

The amount of sleep each person needs depends on many factors including age. Infants generally require about 16 hours a day, while teenagers need about 9 hours on average. For most adults, 7 to 8 hours a night appears to be the best amount of sleep, although some people may need as few as 5 hours or as many as 10 hours of sleep each day. Women in the first 3 months of pregnancy often need several more hours of sleep than usual. The amount of sleep a person needs also increases if he or she has been deprived of sleep in previous days. While we may get used to a sleep-deprived schedule, our judgment, reaction time, and other functions are still impaired. Experts say that if you feel drowsy during the day, even during boring activities, you haven't had enough sleep. If you routinely fall asleep within 5 minutes of lying down, you probably have severe sleep deprivation. The widespread practice of "burning the candle at both ends" in Western industrialized societies has created so much sleep deprivation that what is really abnormal sleepiness is now almost the norm.

(Adapted from *When You Can't Sleep: The ABCs of ZZZs*, by the National Sleep Foundation.)