Instructions for Sleep Hygiene – How to Sleep Better

Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to sleep. Tossing and turning. Your mind is racing, going over everything that happened today. Night noises keep you awake. What can you do? There ARE things you can do! Read on and learn some new tricks to sleep well. These tips are also known as "Sleep Hygiene."

- Sleep only when sleepy

This reduces the time you are awake in bed.

- If you can’t fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something boring until you feel sleepy

Sit quietly in the dark or read the warranty on your refrigerator. Don’t expose yourself to bright light while you are up. The light gives cues to your brain that it is time to wake up.

- Don’t take naps

This will ensure you are tired at bedtime. If you just can’t make it through the day without a nap, sleep less than one hour, before 3 pm.

- Get up and go to bed the same time every day

Even on weekends! When your sleep cycle has a regular rhythm, you will feel better.

- Refrain from exercise at least 4 hours before bedtime

Regular exercise is recommended to help you sleep well, but the timing of the workout is important. Exercising in the morning or early afternoon will not interfere with sleep.

- Develop sleep rituals

It is important to give your body cues that it is time to slow down and sleep. Listen to relaxing music, read something soothing for 15 minutes, have a cup of caffeine free tea, do relaxation exercises.

- Only use your bed for sleeping

Refrain from using your bed to watch TV, pay bills, do work or reading. So when you go to bed your body knows it is time to sleep. Sex is the only exception.

- Stay away from nicotine and alcohol at least 4-6 hours before bed. Stay away from caffeine for ideally 12 hours.
Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants that interfere with your ability to fall asleep. Coffee, tea, cola, cocoa, chocolate and some prescription and non-prescription drugs contain caffeine. Caffeine stays in your system for 12 hours. You may be able to fall asleep with caffeine in your system, but it will more likely be a lighter sleep, less restful.

Cigarettes and some drugs contain nicotine. Alcohol may seem to help you sleep in the beginning as it slows brain activity, but you will end up having fragmented sleep.

- Have a light snack before bed
If your stomach is too empty, that can interfere with sleep. However, if you eat a heavy meal before bedtime, that can interfere as well. Dairy products and turkey contain tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer. Tryptophan is probably why a warm glass of milk is sometimes recommended.

- Take a hot bath 90 minutes before bedtime
A hot bath will raise your body temperature, but it is the drop in body temperature that may leave you feeling sleepy.

- Make sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable
A hot room can be uncomfortable. A cooler room along with enough blankets to stay warm is recommended. If light in the early morning bothers you, get a blackout shade or wear a slumber mask. If noise bothers you, wear earplugs or get a "white noise" machine.

- Use sunlight to set your biological clock
As soon as you get up in the morning, go outside and turn your face to the sun for 15 minutes. When going to sleep, make your room as pitch black as possible. This helps to reset your circadian rhythm for sleep. Light wakes you up, darkness will help with sleep, but this routine can take some time.

- Avoid TV with 2-3 hours before bedtime
The light and noise from TV can stimulate and prolong wakefulness.

- If there’s an alarm clock next to your bed, turn it around.
Reading requires the brain to be fully awake. Many people half-awaken, but once they’ve read the time on a clock, they’ve woken themselves up completely. Furthermore the thoughts about the amount of time left if the night can feed anxiety and worsen insomnia.
Mental Mantra – Numbers

1. Begin by closing your eyes.
2. Now repeat the number One to yourself in your head. Repeat it slowly and rhythmically to yourself: one...one...one.
3. Continue this for as long as you can. At some point you will find your mind start to wander. You may start daydreaming or running through things you have to do. You may go on daydreaming for minutes at a time. Once you catch yourself, though, bring yourself back to your number. Now move back to the number.
4. Begin repeating that number again. This time repeat the number two.
5. When your mind wanders again, bring yourself back to center and start again with the next number.

Vipassana Meditation (The Thought Bubble)

1. Begin by sitting comfortably and closing your eyes.
2. Focus on feeling your breathing.
3. Feel the air moving in and out through your nose.
4. Now imagine a thought in your head, that can be about anything.
5. Imagine that thought leaving your head like a bubble, floating away.
6. Let it float away and just watch it leave, not attaching to it, not thinking about it, just watching it go.
7. As the next thought arises, let that thought float away too, away into the world.
8. With each new thought, let it float away.
9. You may find that you'll get caught up in a thought, thinking about it or daydreaming. Once you realize it, let go of it, and see it leave you just like every other thought.

With each of these practices, the techniques are not complex. The key is trying them and sticking through them.

It is when you’ve practiced them, felt restless like you want to stop, but go back and keep practicing for another 20 minutes that you'll start to feel the real effects. As we relax, all the tension and anxiety we’ve kept at bay rises up. This makes us feel restless but should be the time to practice more, because just beyond that anxiety is relaxation.

With all relaxation techniques listed here, try to sit comfortably and in a position where you move as little as possible.
Relaxed Breathing

This technique involves timing your breathing, with a certain number of seconds to inhale, a certain number of seconds to exhale. You should start with a count of about 3 seconds to inhale to start, 6 seconds to exhale.

1. Take a normal calm breath and count the seconds it takes to inhale. Now try doubling this time as you exhale (3 seconds to inhale, 6 to exhale).

2. Continue this breathing for 15 minutes.

3. Relax as you practice this.

4. As you feel more comfortable, the next time you do this you can slow things down a little more (4 secs inhale, 8 secs exhale). Always keep the ratio 1:2. Do not go over 6 seconds on an inhale.

5. Do not hold your breath in between. If you feel light headed, take a break or use a faster rate.

Guided Imagery

In this technique, the goal is to visualize yourself in a peaceful setting.

1. Lie on your back with your eyes closed.
2. Imagine yourself in a favorite, peaceful place. The place may be on a sunny beach with the ocean breezes caressing you, swinging in a hammock in the mountains or in your own backyard. Any place that you find peaceful and relaxing is OK.
3. Imagine you are there. See and feel your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the flowers or the barbecue, feel the warmth of the sun and any other sensations that you find. Relax and enjoy it.
4. You can return to this place any night you need to. As you use this place more and more you will find it easier to fall asleep as this imagery becomes a sleep conditioner.
5. Some patients find it useful to visualize something boring. This may be a particularly boring teacher or lecturer, co-worker or friend.
Relaxation Techniques

Instructions:
Practice two techniques twice a day every day, and more as needed until you have mastered them.

Progressive Relaxation

This technique is often most useful when you tape the instructions beforehand and listen to the tape. You can tape these instructions, reading them slowly and leaving a short pause after each one.

- Lie on your back, close your eyes.
- Feel your feet. Sense their weight. Become aware of the muscles in them, how they feel, whether they're tensed or relaxed. If you can't tell whether something is tensed or relaxed, actively tense them, and that's what you don't want. Now will those muscles to relax. Once you feel you've relaxed your feet, move up to your calves.
- Feel your calves. Become aware of the muscles in them, how they feel. Now will them to relax.
- Feel your knees. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel you upper legs and thighs. Feel their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your abdomen and chest. Sense your breathing. Consciously will them to relax. Deepen your breathing slightly and feel your abdomen and chest sink into the bed.
- Feel your buttocks. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your hands. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your upper arms. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your shoulders. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your neck. Sense its weight. Consciously relax it and feel it sink into the bed.
- Feel your head and skull. Sense its weight. Consciously relax it and feel it sink into the bed.
- Feel your mouth and jaw. Consciously relax them. Pay particular attention to your jaw muscles and unclench them if you need to. Feel your mouth and jaw relax and sink into the bed.
- Feel your eyes. Sense if there is tension in your eyes. Sense if you are forcibly closing your eyelids. Consciously relax your eyelids and feel the tension slide off the eyes.
- Feel your face and cheeks. Consciously relax them and feel the tension slide off into the bed.
- Mentally scan your body. If you find any place that is still tense, then consciously relax that place and let it sink into the bed.
**Toe Tensing**

This one may seem like a bit of a contradiction to the previous one, but by alternately tensing and relaxing your toes, you actually draw tension from the rest of the body. Try it!

1. Lie on your back, close your eyes.
2. Sense your toes.
3. Now pull all 10 toes back toward your face. Count to 10 slowly.
4. Now relax your toes.
5. Count to 10 slowly.
6. Now repeat the above cycle 10 times.

**Deep Breathing**

By concentrating on our breathing, deep breathing allows the rest of our body to relax itself. Deep breathing is a great way to relax the body and get everything into synchrony. Relaxation breathing is an important part of yoga and martial arts for this reason.

1. Lie on your back.
2. Slowly relax your body. You can use the progressive relaxation technique we described above.
3. Begin to inhale slowly through your nose if possible. Fill the lower part of your chest first, then the middle and top part of your chest and lungs. Be sure to do this slowly, over 8–10 seconds.
4. Hold your breath for a second or two.
5. Then quietly and easily relax and let the air out.
6. Wait a few seconds and repeat this cycle.
7. If you find yourself getting dizzy, then you are overdoing it. Slow down.
8. You can also imagine yourself in a peaceful situation such as on a warm, gentle ocean. Imagine that you rise on the gentle swells of the water as you inhale and sink down into the waves as you exhale.
9. You can continue this breathing technique for as long as you like until you fall asleep.