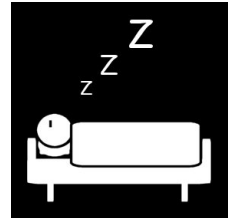


SLEEP HYGIENE

What is Sleep Hygiene?

Sleep hygiene refers to a set of recommendations about one's lifestyle, environment, and sleep routines - all aimed at promoting healthy sleep. Through education about how these different factors can affect sleep-wake patterns, **sleep hygiene encourages the practice of healthy sleep habits.**



Sometimes there may be a simple solution to a person's sleep problem, such as limiting excessive coffee. However, for most people, making small changes to several, or all, sleep hygiene areas will give them the best chance of improving sleep.

Read through the below information and identify areas that you might be able to work on – and then try them out! The key is to experiment to see what works best for *you*.

1. LIFESTYLE FACTORS

The main lifestyle factors known to have an effect on sleep are caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, diet, and exercise.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a type of drug called a stimulant. This means that it awakens you by having a stimulating effect on your nervous system. Too much caffeine is very good at keeping you awake. Caffeine has a half-life of approximately five to six hours, meaning that it takes this long for its concentration in your bloodstream to reduce by half. So, if you have a 300ml cup of coffee at 7 a.m. containing approximately 150 milligrams of caffeine, by 1 p.m. your body will still have 75 milligrams of caffeine in circulation.

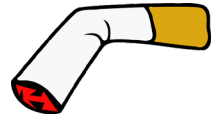


Most people know that caffeine is found in coffee and tea, but many other products also contain caffeine. For example cocoa, chocolate bars, soft drinks like sodas, and some medications that can be bought over the counter for headaches and weight loss.

If you would like to cut down on caffeine, or cut out caffeine altogether, you can try switching to decaffeinated tea or coffee, herbal tea or caffeine-free coke. Please note that some people who are used to drinking caffeinated beverages on a daily basis experience headaches for the first few days of not drinking them. This reflects a withdrawal effect but disappears quickly after a couple of days.

Nicotine

Nicotine, which is found in cigarettes (including e-cigarettes) and other tobacco products, is also a stimulant drug and has similar effects to caffeine on sleep. Although many people say that they find smoking relaxing, the overall effect of nicotine on the body's central nervous system is that of stimulation. What this means is that nicotine will make it harder for you to fall asleep and to stay asleep.



If you smoke, you could try to cut down smoking in the evening before you go to bed. Try not to smoke if you wake up in the middle of the night. You need to consider the possibility that you wake up craving for a cigarette and that this has become part of your smoking habit.

Alcohol

Alcohol, unlike caffeine and nicotine, is a depressant drug. Normally, depressants should help us sleep, but it has been found that even a moderate amount of alcohol in the evening can actually have a disruptive effect on sleep.



Alcohol may help you to fall into a deep sleep at the beginning of the night. In this sense it is an effective hypnotic drug. However, as the alcohol is absorbed into your body, mild withdrawal symptoms occur that may be sufficient to wake you up or put you into a lighter form of sleep.

Alcohol can also cause you to become dehydrated so you may wake up thirsty in the middle of the night, and need to go to the toilet more often than usual. It is recommended to avoid drinking alcohol from 4 hours before bedtime.

Diet

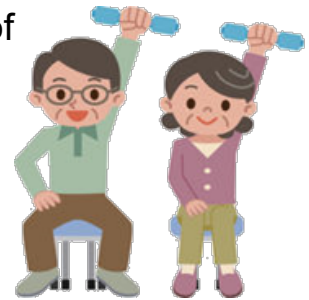


Hunger can cause wakefulness. That is why a light snack before bedtime can help us sleep. On the other hand, going to bed too full can also cause wakefulness. Our bodies are busy digesting the food, and this interferes with sleep.

It is wise to also avoid snacking if you wake up in the night, as your body may come to expect food at this time. If you do snack at night then you run the risk of continuing to wake up in the middle of the night to satisfy your hunger.

Exercise

People who are physically fit have a better quality of sleep, so a good way to promote sleep is to engage in regular exercise. The World Health Organisation recommends a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week (roughly 30 minutes each day for 5 days), but even a small increase from your current activity levels may have benefits for sleep.



The type of exercise you do depends on what kind of activities you enjoy. It is recommended, however, that in order to get fit and stay fit, you should take up exercise that gets your heart pumping. Walking, swimming, cycling, skating, football, squash, badminton, and aerobics are just few of the many activities that do this.

While exercising at any time of the day is likely to be beneficial for sleep, research has shown that regular exercise taken in the morning or early evening may have the largest effects on sleep quality.

2. BEDROOM FACTORS

The main bedroom factors that can affect the quality of your sleep are noise levels, room temperature, air quality, lighting levels, and the comfort of the mattress and pillows.

Noise

Most people get used to noise that is continuous, such as a ticking clock, or even a partner's snoring. Nevertheless, even if people do not actually wake up in response to noises, their sleep may be affected as a



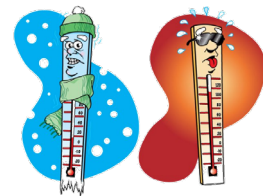
result of brief transitions from deeper to lighter forms of sleep.

Try to figure out if there are any noises in your home environment which could be interfering with your sleep and find a solution to eliminate them. Sleeping with earplugs may or may not be the answer, but you could experiment and find out.

Remember to turn off emails or other alerts from electronic devices so that they do not interfere with sleep.

Room temperature

Extreme temperatures at either end of the range can affect our sleep. A room that is too hot (more than 24°C) can cause us to have restless body movements during sleep, more night-time awakenings, and less dream sleep.



Sleep prefers the cool, but a room that is too cold (less than 12°C) can make it difficult to get to sleep and can cause more unpleasant and emotional dreams. The ideal room temperature is around 18°C.

Lighting

It is a good thing to be exposed to *natural sunlight* during the day – to keep our brains and bodies alert - but when going to bed at night your bedroom should not be too bright.

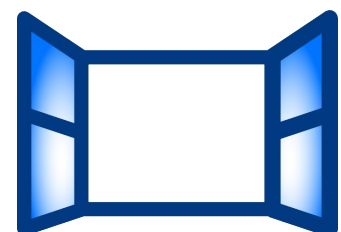


A combination of summer nights, strong street lights and thin curtains should be avoided as light promotes wakefulness through our eyes. Your bedroom should be almost completely dark once you have switched off the light.

The simplest solution is to cover windows with thick curtains, blinds, or even a blanket during your sleep period. Some people may also choose to wear an eye-mask.

You should also avoid using electronic devices (e.g., phones, e-readers, laptops) close to bed-time or when in bed, since the light emitted from these devices may increase alertness, making it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep.

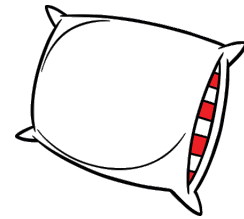
Air Quality



A stuffy room is likely to cause an uncomfortable sleep, while fresh air will promote sleep. By opening a window before going to bed, or adjusting the air-conditioning you could improve the circulation of good-quality air.

Mattress and pillows

An uncomfortable bed may contribute to restless sleep so it is important that your bed suits your sleep needs. What people prefer and find most suitable depends on personal taste and therefore it might be worth experimenting a bit to make sure that you have a comfortable mattress, pillow and bed-covering.



3. SLEEP ROUTINE

Develop a strong and stable sleep schedule

Keeping regular sleep and wake times is associated with better health and better sleep quality. Aim to sleep at your preferred time each night, and rise at the same time each morning, ideally across both weekdays and weekends.



Use an alarm clock if you need to. This will also help establish a regular time at which you are exposed to sunlight in the morning, which acts as an important cue for our body-clock.

Put the day to rest

Set aside some time in the early evening to reflect on the events of the day and make a plan for tomorrow. Avoid mentally stimulating activities in the 2 hours before retiring to bed, such as work-related tasks.



Research shows that an active mind before sleep can both delay how long it takes to fall asleep and lead to lighter forms of sleep. Keep a notepad beside your bed to record any thoughts that may enter your head while initiating sleep.

Napping

Avoid napping where possible. Napping can weaken sleep pressure - making it harder to fall asleep, as well as reduce the depth of sleep. If you do feel the need to nap, restrict nap periods to the afternoon and for a limited duration (e.g. less than 20 minutes), to reduce



the possibility that night-time sleep becomes disturbed.

Good luck with your sleep programme!

