

Sleep Tips

If you want to look your best, be fully alert, in a good mood, mentally sharp, creative, and energetic all day long, you need to get adequate sleep.

Sleep needs vary from person to person and change with age. The average one-year-old child sleeps 14-15 hours a day (including naps), two-year-olds sleep twelve hours, and children over five sleep ten hours per night. Sleep experts have found that most teens function at their best if they get nine to ten hours of sleep per night. Young adults generally should be getting at least eight hours.

How do you know if you are getting enough sleep? Some indications that you are sleep deprived are:

1. You need an alarm clock to wake up at the appropriate time in the morning.
2. You find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning.
3. You fall asleep in class.
4. You fall asleep in the evening watching TV.
5. You sleep in late on weekends whenever you get the chance, whether or not you stayed up late the night before.
6. You often feel fatigued and tired during the day.

Since there is generally little choice about when school starts and hence when to get up, getting to bed earlier is usually the only way for a schoolchild or teen to get more sleep. For some “night owls”, this may prove difficult.

Here are some sleep strategies to try. Not all of these work for everyone. Try them and see what is best for you:

1. Establish a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed at the same time every night, and wake up (eventually without an alarm clock!) at the same time every morning, including weekends. Especially avoid sleeping in late on Sunday mornings. This will make it harder to fall asleep Sunday night, you’ll have trouble waking up in time for school Monday morning, and you’ll be starting off the week on the wrong foot.
2. Make your bedroom as dark and quiet as possible. Consider earplugs if it’s too noisy or black out curtains or a blindfold if it’s too light. When it’s time to get up, let in as much natural light into the room as you can and turn on all of your lights while getting ready. Get outside into natural sunlight as early as possible.
3. Make sure that the temperature in the room is not too hot or too cold and that you are dressed (or undressed) in whatever is most comfortable for you.
4. Exercise to stay fit. The best time to exercise is in the late afternoon (right after school) or early evening, not too close to bedtime.
5. Eat a proper diet. Don’t skip meals. Eat a big lunch and a relatively lighter dinner. Avoid a big meal within four hours of going to bed.
6. Don’t smoke. Nicotine is a stimulant.
7. Reduce caffeine intake. Do not drink coffee or tea within six hours of bedtime. This includes iced tea, mocha, latte, etc. Do not drink caffeinated soft drinks, including Coke,



Pepsi, Dr. Pepper, and Mountain Dew within six hours of bedtime. The same holds true for eating chocolate.

8. Do not drink alcohol.
9. Take a warm bath before bed, or use a spa or hot tub.
10. Maintain a relaxing atmosphere in the bedroom. You should associate your bed only with sleeping, so don't watch TV, play video games, or even read in bed. (Sit in a chair in your room for doing homework, watching TV, etc.).
11. No pets in your bed! A teddy bear might be OK, though.
12. Clear your mind at bedtime. If you have a lot of worries, set aside a few minutes before bed to write them down in a notebook and come up with a plan to deal with them. A perfectly acceptable plan might be to deal with the problem tomorrow. Then put the notebook aside. That transfers the problem from your brain to the notebook.
13. Try some bedtime relaxation techniques:
 - a) Progressive muscle relaxation. Tense (squeeze) the muscles in your toes for five seconds, then relax them for fifteen seconds. Then do the muscles of the feet, then the legs, and keep moving up until you've tensed and relaxed the eyes and forehead.
 - b) Yoga: classes may be available at your high school, health club, or local parks district.
 - c) Mental imagery and fantasy: Imagine yourself in a relaxing situation, such as lying on a beach in Hawaii, floating through the air, etc. Feel the warmth of the sun, the sound of the waves, etc.
 - d) Deep breaths: Take five deep breaths and as you count each one, say to yourself, "I'm getting more relaxed, peaceful, and serene. I'm slowly falling asleep."
 - e) Mind games: Imagine you're writing six-foot high numerals on a large blackboard. Start at one hundred and go backwards.
 - f) Counting sheep: This works for teenagers too, not just cartoon characters.
 - g) Buy a CD or cassette designed to put you to sleep. These often contain relaxing sounds like ocean waves, rainfall, white noise, etc. These are sold at all of the major music stores and Internet music sites.
14. Establish a bedtime ritual. When you find something that works from these suggestions, stick with the same thing every night. For instance, take a warm bath, then listen to some music, then read a (?boring) book, then turn out the light and get into bed once you start to feel drowsy.
15. Avoid trying too hard to get to sleep. If you're not sleepy after a half-hour in bed, or if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep, get up and leave the bedroom. Try to stay in the dark, and listen to some soft music, watch some boring TV (infomercials!), or read. When you start feeling sleepy, get back in bed. Avoid falling asleep on the couch or in a chair though, as this is not as restful as sleep in a bed.
16. Reduce stress as much as possible. Take control of your life. Focus on what is important. Do you really need to work that after-school job? Can you cut back on TV, video games, or talking on the phone? If you can't seem to figure out a healthy way to deal with stress, worry, or anxiety, consider setting up a counseling session with someone from our psychology department.
17. Most of all, learn to value sleep. Leave the all-nighters and partying for those who don't care about their daytime alertness and performance.