



Glencoe Regional Health Services

Occupational Therapy

Sleep Hygiene – Basic Guidelines

Sleep hygiene is your personal collection of habits that determine the quality of your sleep.

Where to start?

- Do I go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning?
- Do I have a regular sleeping pattern? This allows your body's biological clock to take care of your ability to fall asleep. Maintain a regular bedtime and awakening time schedule, even on the weekends. Get up about the same time every day, regardless of what time you fell asleep.

What is a good sleep environment?

- Is my room dark? Avoid lights, including night lights. Keep the windows covered with blinds or curtains. Even small amounts of light make your brain think it is morning and disrupts deep sleep.
- Is my room cool? Keep the temperature of your sleep environment cool enough to necessitate blankets for warmth.
- Is my room quiet? Falling asleep and staying asleep is much easier if your environment is quiet. Use earplugs or a "white noise machine" if you cannot control the noise level in your sleep environment.
- Is my mattress comfortable? Make sure you are sleeping on a comfortable mattress. A good mattress will support your back and will not leave you stiff and sore in the morning.

What is a good night of sleep?

- Do I have uninterrupted sleep?
- Do I feel refreshed in the morning?
- Do I sleep deeply?
- What is the length of time that works for me? The average adult needs 7.5-8.0 hours of sleep per night.

What will stop you from having a good night sleep?

- Do I drink alcohol before bed? Alcohol may make it easier to fall asleep but it is at the cost of quality. Alcohol fragments your sleep, so you will not feel well rested even after a full night in dreamland.
- Do my medications have side effects associated with insomnia? This is also the case for certain herbal remedies. Make sure to read the accompanying informational material and to consult your doctor or pharmacist! Most common culprits: asthma medication, corticosteroids, blood pressure medications and anti-depressants.
- Do I suffer from depression? Fatigue is one of the most prevalent symptoms of depression and is closely related to poor sleep. Many people with depression have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, so they oversleep or they get fatigued and nap during the day. This creates an irregular sleep routine.

What should you do to fall asleep easily?

- Do I have a bedtime ritual? This sends a cue to your body that it is time to settle down and fall asleep. A ritual does not have to be a long process, and can be as simple as brushing your teeth and reading for 15 minutes. It's also a great time to engage in a relaxation technique.
- Do I need to unwind earlier in the evening? Take the time early in the evening to relax your body and mind. Falling asleep can be almost impossible if your mind is racing – working through problems, weighing decisions and reviewing the day past or upcoming. A calm, clear mind is necessary for a relaxed body.
- Am I waking up in the middle of the night because my mind is racing? Designate time to write down problems and possible solutions in the late afternoon or early evening, not close to bedtime.
- Would taking a warm bath help? Warm baths raise your body's temperature. After the bath your body cools off and this cooling is what makes you sleepy.
- Dim the lights and turn off all lighted screens at least an hour before bed. Bright lights interrupt your body's natural sleep-wake cycle because light tricks the brain into remaining in "day-light" mode.

What will impede the transition to sleep?

- Do I stay up too late? By staying up too late, you are liable to get a "second wind" which will make it difficult for you to fall asleep even if it is late.
- Am I eating a large or heavy meal 2-3 hours before bed? Heartburn, indigestion, and the need to urinate are counterproductive and end up disturbing your sleep.
- Am I doing things other than sleeping in bed (watching TV, working, etc.)? If you engage in activities other than sleep or sex in bed, your brain will cease to recognize cues indicating that bed is the place for sleep.
- Am I drinking caffeine 6 hours before going to bed? Caffeine is a stimulant that keeps you awake.
- Am I smoking cigarettes 2 hours before going to bed? The nicotine found in cigarettes is a stimulant and will interfere with your body's ability to fall asleep immediately.
- Am I exercising directly before bedtime? Don't exercise just before bedtime since the natural high produced from exercise will inhibit your ability to fall asleep immediately. Exercising in the morning can help you sleep at night.
- Am I trying to force myself to fall asleep? If you can't fall asleep after 30 minutes, it is wise to get up and do something that is not stimulating. Forcing yourself to lie there will only frustrate you and take you even farther from your goal of sleep.
- Am I taking daytime naps? Avoid daytime naps because they stagger your body's biological rhythm. By taking naps, you might not be tired at bedtime and this will encourage you to stay up later. If you don't go to bed at a reasonable hour, you might feel tired the next day and opt for another daytime nap, which establishes a vicious cycle. If napping is necessary, sleep for less than 1 hour before 3:00 p.m.