

SLEEP

How to Rest Easy

Have you ever lain awake in bed and struggled to fall asleep? Awaking during the night or trying to fall asleep in the first place can have detrimental effects on your performance the next day in terms of energy and fatigue.

Sleep is so vital to our wellbeing. We need to be well rested for increased energy, to function well during the day, for our memory, mood, concentration and even our immune system. Most adults need between seven to nine hours of sleep a night.

Every now and again, we may have a late night and we feel the effects a few less hours of sleep has on our bodies. Our complexion can look dull and lifeless, and we feel more moody and lethargic.

If you are frequently experiencing a disturbed sleep, read on to learn how making small changes to your day can help.

Problem: Your Diet

What you eat throughout the day can have an affect on your sleep. Having many stimulants during the day can lead to a restless sleep. These stimulants include coffee, tea, chocolate, soft drinks and energy drinks that contain caffeine. Avoid having any food or drink containing caffeine after 2 pm as it can take hours for caffeine to clear the body.

If you are dieting or limiting your intake of food in any way, you will find that this has a negative effect on your sleep as well. If you experience low blood sugar from lack of eating, you will find it harder to fall asleep, as the neurotransmitters in your brain that control hunger have to work harder and this leads to a restless sleep.

It is best to avoid fatty, spicy and high protein meals at night due to the extra effort it takes to digest these types of meals. As your body works hard on digestion, you are less likely to fall asleep. Also, avoid too many liquids at night to avoid a midnight bathroom trip.

Eat a light, yet satisfying meal around 6 pm to 7 pm at the latest, to avoid going to bed full. Eat a dinner of fish or chicken with vegetables or rice. Always have a salad with your dinner that includes cos lettuce. This type of lettuce is a natural opiate that will help to relax you and ready you for sleep.

If you feel hungry before bedtime, try a warm glass of milk or even a tub of yoghurt to keep your blood sugar levels even. Both contain an amino acid called tryptophan that helps your brain to make a hormone called melatonin that is imperative for sleep.

Problem: Work Stress

You work late into the night or even lie awake in bed brainstorming or thinking about tomorrow's "to do" list. It is best for your sleep and health to stop working at least two or three hours before bedtime. If you feel you still have many tasks to do, then you may need to look at your time management. When we are stressed, adrenaline is pumping and we are more alert, so sleep will be harder to come by.

Everyone deserves "down-time." Eliminate TV watching as a form of relaxation as it can be too stimulating. Instead, choose to read a book or spend some time in bed writing in a journal and purging all your thoughts onto paper.

A recent client of HealthMastery was having trouble switching off his thoughts in bed at night. He was advised to carry a notebook with him each day and jot down ideas as they came to him. He found this simple tip to be the key in stopping his brain chatter.

Too often, the things we think about in bed when we are trying to fall asleep are the ideas and thoughts we are scared of forgetting! Getting your thoughts down on paper before bedtime is immensely helpful. Tell yourself you will tackle the list in the morning and focus on relaxing so you are more productive the next day.

Problem: Your Environment and Habits

Establish a routine for bedtime. When you feel tired, head to bed and relax. Read or just relax. Do this routinely for best results.

When you awake in the morning, do not linger in bed. This can actually make you less alert during the day.

Your environment plays a part in your sleep. When you are on holiday or staying away from home, it may be harder to get to sleep due to the unfamiliar environment. If you can, take with you your pillow or follow the same wind down routine before bed.

The temperature of your room is also important. In the summer months when it is muggy, many of us find it hard to fall asleep. Still keep a light sheet over you when you go to sleep, so you do not feel too cold when the temperature drops in the middle of the night. Wear loose fitting nightwear that allows your skin to breathe. Better yet, sleep naked!

Working out regularly will also do wonders for your sleep patterns long term. Exercise during the day to burn off stress hormones and extra energy. Just avoid exercise late at night before bed as it is too stimulating.

NALISHA PATEL
HealthMastery - Mobile Personal Training
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