

SLEEP HYGIENE SUMMARY

Sleep Hygiene is a term used to describe good sleep habits, that is, things you can do to give yourself the best chance of a good refreshing sleep. If you're having trouble sleeping, attention to some of these simple "Dos and Don'ts" may help.

DO Go to bed at the same time each day. The body has a natural clock which will make you sleep when you're ready for bed. Try not to ignore this. Going to be too early may also result in disturbed sleep.

DO Get up from bed at the same time each day. Getting up at the same time helps to keep your body clock in sync with what's going on outside. If you can stick to fairly regular waking and sleeping time, your body will become accustomed to it. However, this doesn't mean that you should be obsessive about it, an occasional night out or sleep in is not going to hurt.

DO Get regular exercise each day. There is good evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. A regular walk before dinner or in the morning is ideal.

DO Try to spend some daytime outdoors or in natural light. Light is important for the body to produce melatonin which is a sleep promoting substance produced by our bodies. Sunlight early in the day is particularly helpful for your body clock.

DO Make the bedroom a restful place. This means keeping the temperature cool – not cold, keeping noises and outside light to a minimum and leaving distracting things such as ticking clocks, mobile phones and even TV outside the room. Keeping your bedroom uncluttered and decorated in soft natural tones will also help achieve a restful feeling.

DO Use your bed only as a bedroom. Some people use the bed as a lounge room, by knitting, studying, watching television, telephoning, etc. Try to avoid this and make sure that the bed is associated with sleeping. The brain makes connections between places and events and you need to reinforce these.

DO Take medications as directed. Prescription medications may cause you to be alert or sleepy and the instructions should be followed carefully. Don't vary the time of the day that you take your medication.

DO Be comfortable and relaxed. If you have uncomfortable pillows, mattress or bedclothes fix or replace them. If you are cold in bed, warm the room or wear pyjamas, warm hands and feet are particularly important. A warm bath about an hour before bedtime causes the body's temperature to rise and the fall may help promote relaxation and sleep.

DO Understand your sleep needs. Most people need between seven (7) and nine (9) hours sleep each day. This includes naps and time spent dozing in front of television. Don't be unrealistic with your sleep expectations.

DON'T Exercise just before going to bed. Exercise will stimulate the body and may make it difficult to fall asleep.

DON'T Engage in stimulating activity just before bed. Playing competitive games, watching an exciting program on television, playing computerized games or having an important discussion stimulates your mind and thought will overflow to the bedroom. Worrying about or planning the next day's activity may be a natural thing but try to avoid it.

DON'T Drink caffeine containing drinks in the evening. Coffee, tea and other caffeinated drinks including soft drinks will stimulate you and make sleep difficult. A glass of warm milk is an old fashioned recipe that may work well. Make sure you go to the toilet before going to bed to reduce the need to wake and go during the night.

DON'T Go to bed hungry or too full. If you are in the habit of taking a light supper, you should keep doing this but don't eat too much.

DON'T Nap in the evening before you go to bed. If you are in the habit of taking a daytime nap and it doesn't seem to affect your night-time sleep, you might want to keep doing this but try not to sleep in the evening as that is going to reduce your body's need to fall asleep.

DON'T Stay in bed if you are awake. You can't force yourself to sleep. If you don't fall asleep in a reasonable time, perhaps 20-30minutes, then get up and do something boring, but do this in another room. Try and keep the lighting fairly dim. When you are tired, go back to bed. This helps your mind associated the bed with sleeping.

DON'T Share your beds with children or pets. Research has shown that parents sleeping with young children sleep less, and have more disturbed sleep.

DON'T Smoke. Quitting smoking not only brings many health benefits to any smoker, it eliminates the stimulant effect of nicotine that contributes to sleep loss.

DON'T Use alcohol to help you sleep. Alcohol may help you to sleep but it has a number of bad effects. It causes you to need more trips to the toilet, it causes fragmented sleep and it worsens snoring and sleep apnoea.

DON'T Rely on sleeping tablets to help you sleep. Sleeping tablets have a role where there is some event or other circumstance that may temporarily cause you to have trouble falling asleep but they are a temporary fix only. Some tablets may cause you to be a bit sleepy in the daytime and when you stop taking them you may get a "rebound" and find it harder to fall asleep.