

SLEEP 'HYGIENE' TOP 10

This is a strange name but it refers to helping you sleep in ways that are healthy for you and free from things that get in the way of good sleep patterns. When sleep is disrupted your mental health can suffer and the tiredness makes it harder to cope with everyday things. This can make you worry more and then lose more sleep and so on. So here are some ideas that have been shown to clean up your sleep patterns and help you cope better.

1. Ensure **the room** you sleep in is not cluttered, as it needs to be **calm and relaxing**.
2. **Remove computers and television from the room** – these stimulate your brain even if you aren't looking at them – practice relaxation instead.
3. **Avoid watching late night movies or reading books that are disturbing or distressing** giving you nightmares and sleep disturbance. Read lighter stuff!
4. **Avoid any caffeinated drinks** like coffee or cola or chocolate after 5pm each evening. **A milky drink** can instead be soothing and assist sleep as well as offering nourishment through the hours when sleeping so your body can fully relax.
5. **Avoid eating food late** as anything highly spiced, strong tasting or with caffeine (chocolate for example) means your digestive system is busy and it distracts you from sleeping. So eat some healthy sleep food earlier.
6. **Avoid drinking alcohol late at night**. Alcohol can make you sleepy but then you get 'rebound insomnia' which means waking up dehydrated and needing lots of water and unable to sleep again easily. Drink water or juice instead.
7. **No matter how tired you feel, have consistent bedtime and wake time:** always go to bed the same time each night and get up the same time each morning (with only a small change for weekends). Sleeping in after no sleep teaches your mind to believe it should be awake in the night and asleep in the day and you end up with 'sleep reversal' so you get into poor sleep habits that are hard to break. **If you must nap** take only 1 hour between 1pm and 5pm and set the alarm – it avoids disrupting that sleep-wake cycle and has been proven to help.
8. **Get appropriate exercise each day** – moderate physical activity helps your body feel tired and then be ready to be relaxed and it releases endorphins (chemicals in your brain that make you feel good and more likely to relax).
9. **Avoid 'deep and meaningful' discussions at bedtime!** Decide to leave it until the next day and agree to wait until then as such discussions stimulate the brain. So agreeing to 'sleep on it' is a good idea.
10. **Avoid sleeping tablets if at all possible**. If your doctor prescribes tablets they will usually be for a very short time as they are habit forming so try to use sleep hygiene ideas as listed instead as these are a habit for life!

Healthy sleep includes REM sleep (rapid eye movement) where we are dreaming. It is understood this is when the brain processes issues arising in the day and things that are on our minds. If sleep is disturbed there is little REM sleep so this makes you tired, distressed and more vulnerable to feeling depressed or even suicidal. We do not always remember our dreams so you may get this REM sleep without knowing it but if you seldom wake refreshed it is possible you are not getting REM sleep. If there is regular sleep disturbance you need to consider sleep hygiene to get back on track. Research has shown these are important ways to clean up your sleeping habits - that is why it is called sleep hygiene!

Sweet Dreams!

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