

Can't Sleep?

Sleep problems are a common symptom for people who are recovering from traumatic events, or who are battling with symptoms of anxiety and depression. You may find that your usual methods of sleep are no longer working for you. Disturbing thoughts or nightmares can also disrupt your sleep, and may be a response to recent adjustments or life events.

If your sleep problems persist after trying these tips consistently and regularly, it may be a good idea to get a medical check-up with your physician. Let them know what is happening in your life. Your sleep problems can be organic in nature as well as have psychological contributors.

Tips for a Better Night's Sleep:

1. Condition yourself to associate your bed with sleep. To do this you must use your bed for sleep only – no reading or watching TV in bed.
2. Go to bed when you are sleepy-tired. This will eliminate time spent in bed tossing and turning.
3. If you find yourself lying in bed for more than 30 minutes and can't fall asleep, get up, move to another room of the house and do something relaxing. Don't engage in activities that will render sleep unlikely such as doing laundry, cleaning house, reading an interesting book, playing computer games, etc.
4. Wind down during the second half of the evening before bedtime. Give yourself about 90 minutes before bed to start relaxing. Try a warm bath, lighting candles, or listening to relaxing music.
5. Don't get involved in any kind of anxiety provoking activities or thoughts before bed (i.e., don't start a big project like organizing the closet)
6. Do some breathing exercises or practice progressive muscle relaxation (systematically tensing and relaxing major muscle groups in your body) before bed.
7. Avoid rigorous exercise shortly before bedtime. Even though you may be tired after your workout, exercising before bed actually causes you to become more awake physiologically. Exercise in the afternoon or early evening can be helpful, but make sure you complete your workout no later than 3 hours before you go to bed.

8. Avoid late afternoon/evening naps and do not allow yourself to doze off while reading or watching television prior to bedtime. Even brief episodes of sleep may interfere with subsequent sleep. Naps early in the day should be limited to less than one hour.
9. Avoid large meals and excessive fluid intake. Any bedtime snacks should be small and consist of non-spicy foods with sedating potential. For example: peanut butter, dairy products (warm milk) and turkey meat are high in tryptophan, which increases sleepiness.
10. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes several hours prior to bedtime.
11. If you find yourself lying in bed worrying and can't sleep, try setting aside a **“worry time”** some hours before bedtime and tell yourself that any difficulties you cannot resolve during that allotted time can be put off until the next day.
12. Some people find it helpful to schedule a half-hour to write down concerns and hopes in a journal every night to free up your sleep from processing your dilemmas.
13. Make sure that your bedroom is conducive to good sleep. Keep the room dark and cool. Overly warm rooms do not promote good quality sleep.
14. Ensure a quiet sleeping space with a white noise generator or earplugs. Make sure phones and answering machines are set to silent mode.
15. If you have disturbing dreams or nightmares, consider processing your feelings with a therapist or use your imagination to create an alternative ending.
16. Give yourself time to condition your body to a new routine. Practice these tips regularly and consistently.