



GET A BETTER NIGHT'S SLEEP

If you struggle to fall asleep to begin with, a full night's rest can be impossible. Sleep experts recommend making small changes for big results.

- 1. Keep a consistent sleep schedule.** Our bodies operate on a “circadian rhythm,” an internal balance of rest and activity.
 - Turning in at the same time every night conditions your body to recognize when it needs to wind down.
 - Establishing a regular morning wake-up time helps maintain this rhythm. Once you start a positive cycle, sleep will come faster, last longer, and increase in quality.
- 2. Maintain your schedule on weekends.** On the weekend, it's tempting to stay up late and sleep in. Unfortunately, altering your sleep schedule by just a few hours over two days can disrupt your circadian rhythm. If you deviate from your schedule Friday and Saturday, getting to bed at your usual time Sunday evening might not be enough to get back on track.
- 3. Exercise regularly.** In general, exercising regularly makes it easier to fall asleep and contributes to sounder sleep. However, exercising sporadically or right before going to bed will make falling asleep more difficult. Finish your exercise at least 3 hours before bedtime. Late afternoon exercise is the perfect way to help you fall asleep at night.
- 4. Finish eating 2-3 hours before bedtime.** It is best to avoid a heavy meal or spicy foods that may cause heartburn too close to bedtime. Restricting fluids close to bedtime may prevent nighttime awakenings to go to the bathroom, though some people find milk or herbal, non-caffeinated teas to be soothing and a helpful part of a bedtime routine.
- 5. Avoid stimulants.** To ensure that you can both fall asleep and sleep soundly, avoid all stimulants for several hours before your scheduled sleep time. Caffeine typically stays in your system for 3-5 hours. The nicotine in cigarettes not only prevents smokers from falling asleep, but also affects the quality of sleep, as the body can go into nicotine withdrawal during the night. Alcohol, although often thought of as a sedative, actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings.
- 6. Relax prior to going to bed.** Developing a before-bed routine soothes away stress and allows your body to gently unwind.
 - Soaking in a warm bath or hot tub eases the transition from daily activity to sleep; just make sure you give yourself enough time to cool off before hitting the sack.
 - Meditation, yoga, and other techniques can maximize relaxation.
 - Reading in bed has become a pre-sleep ritual, but a really good book can easily steal an hour of more of rest.
 - Working in bed not only postpones sleep, but can cause frustrations that keep you up long after you set aside the laptop.



Patience. Altering your behavior and bedroom environment requires adjustment. Give these changes some time to sink in. Once they become routine, you will get better sleep without even thinking about it.