

Skills for Better Sleep

1. **Develop regular sleep times:** “The circadian system thrives on routine” (Barwick, 2018)
Set a regular sleep schedule that provides enough time for sleep (7-9 hours). Practice getting up and going to sleep at the same times regardless of how tired or awake you feel. One of the most effective strategies for sleep problems is increasing your “sleep drive” which is a force that increases the longer you go without sleep. Napping, as well as briefly dozing off, before your sleep time will greatly interfere with your sleep quality.
2. **Don’t try to fall asleep:**
This causes frustration and anxiety, which inhibits sleep. Remind yourself, “I’ll just rest my body.” Consider a body scan to see if you are holding any tightness as you try to relax.
3. **Use your bed for sleep:**
Many people with sleep troubles use their bed for playing videogames, talking on the phone, etc. Your mind will then associate your bed with being alert instead of asleep. Help your mind connect your bed with rest and calmness.
4. **Don’t go to bed on an overly full stomach or ingest caffeine after morning time:**
Your diet will influence your sleep, and being physically uncomfortable from overeating can make sleep difficult. Avoid afternoon coffee and reduce liquids a few hours before bedtime.
5. **Avoid using alcohol or substances to fall asleep:**
These may help you fall asleep at first, but research shows this significantly reduces sleep quality overall.
6. **Don’t take your worries to bed:**
You can write them down on a note pad and let them go for the night. You can give yourself permission to have the late evening as a “worry free” period of time. When you find yourself worrying, allow your stream of worry thoughts to float by without attaching to them or amplifying them. Consider grounding exercises.
7. **Get regular exercise during the day** (20 minutes or more):
This can be very beneficial for your mood as well. However, do not exercise just prior to going to sleep.

8. **Alter your sleep environment:**

Light reduction is the most powerful environmental change since people can detect the dim light of dawn through their eyelids. Also, can you find a more comfortable pillow or mattress, and do you get too cold or hot at night?

9. **Develop a pre-sleep relaxation routine:**

This can include: soothing music, stretching, meditation, etc. Practice calming yourself and winding down before bedtime. Eliminate screen time and start to unwind an hour before bedtime. Consider using a light filter on your phone to remove the blue light that activates us.

*Sleep patterns take time to change, with time and practice many find these changes in routine to be highly effective.

Based on Dr. Fiona Barwick, Director of Cognitive Behavioral Sleep Medicine, Stanford University; 5/10/2018 Training; Bourne, 2005; Leahy & Holland, 2000; sourcesofinsight.com, 2018.