



GETTING YOUR BEST SLEEP

Sleep is an essential, but often neglected, facet of every person's overall well-being. Our bodies require enough sleep, each night, to be able to carry out essential bodily processes which support our physical and mental health and general quality of life. Sleep deficiency is a common problem, especially for college students who often sacrifice sleep to focus on their studies or to work additional hours. Overtime, chronic sleep deprivation can begin to have negative effects such as increasing anxiety, depression and irritability, and lowering mood, motivation, and cognitive abilities.

How to Get Your Best Sleep?

STICK TO A SCHEDULE:

Set a time to go to bed and wake up every day, regardless of whether you need to be up for work or school. In this schedule, aim for 7-8 hours of sleep and remember that it will take time for your body to adjust.

ESTABLISH A BEDTIME ROUTINE:

Your evening rituals should begin before you try to get to sleep. Working backwards from your desired sleep time, establish a routine that includes changing into your pajamas, having a light snack and turning off all screens. This signals your body that it is time to sleep and will help you sleep and stay asleep.

AVOID STIMULANTS:

Energy drinks, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and other stimulants can keep you awake. It is a good idea to limit these throughout the day but especially before bedtime. Many, for example, won't drink caffeine after lunch so that it doesn't keep them awake in the evening.

GET SOME EXERCISE:

Regular physical activity, either vigorous or light, can enhance the quality of your sleep. Studies have shown that the best time to exercise to support your sleep is either first thing in the morning or in the afternoon. Exercising too close to bedtime can act as a stimulate so avoid that if you can.

AVOID HEAVY MEALS BEFORE BED:

Large meals or drinking too many liquids before bed can create some level of disruption with your sleep. Particularly, liquids can have you getting up for washroom trips, whereas spicy food may cause indigestion or heartburn which would interfere with your quality of sleep.

SLEEP PRIMARILY AT NIGHT:

Although daytime naps can give you a good boost of energy throughout the day, they can take away from your nighttime sleep. Try limiting your daytime naps to less than an hour, ending no later than 3:00 P.M.

NO SCREENS:

Turn off all screens one hour prior to your bedtime as the light emanating from screens is stimulating for the brain. Silence can also help you sleep better. If this is difficult to achieve, try using earplugs, a soothing background noise or a white noise machine.

USE YOUR BED ONLY FOR SLEEP:

To help strengthen the brain's association between your bed and sleep, try to avoid using your bed for studying, TV watching or connecting with family.

USE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

Take a hot shower or bath to relax tense muscles or do some breathing exercises to calm your mind. Some forms of yoga and targeted medication can also help relax as you get ready for sleep.

DON'T CATASTROPHIZE:

If you can't fall asleep, that's okay! Tell yourself "It's okay, I will eventually fall asleep". If you don't fall asleep, get up and do something relaxing like reading a book or meditating – no screens – and then go back to bed when you're tired.

SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL:

If you are still having trouble sleeping, don't hesitate to speak with a doctor. If you opt for medication, ensure they are under your doctor's supervision.