

Strategies to Improve Your Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene is a term used to describe your sleep habits. Here are some general suggestions which have been useful to many patients in improving their sleep hygiene, and thereby reducing their daytime sleepiness.

- Ensure that medical problems which may interfere with sleep (such as angina, asthma, heartburn, breathlessness, pain) are treated, or addressed.
- Reduce stimulants (tea, coffee, cola drinks, chocolate, cigarettes), which prevent quality deep sleep.
- Reduce sedatives (alcohol and some medications) which can impair your ability to have quality deep sleep. You should seek advice from your doctor before stopping prescribed medications.
- Reduce external factors which may arouse you from sleep:
 - Uncomfortable bed;
 - Extremes of temperature or external noise;
 - Ear plugs can be used to exclude noise.
- Attempt to exercise daily in the late afternoon or early evening, at least 4 hours before bedtime and preferably 6 hours before bedtime.
- Minimise evening light and avoid watching TV or using your phone/computer/tablet leading up to bedtime.
- No eating or drinking after seven o'clock in the evening.
- Avoid large meals before bedtime, especially those high in protein.
- Avoid using alcohol to induce sleep.
- Make sure you have breakfast and lunch. Make lunch the biggest meal of the day if possible.
- Only go to bed for intimacy, rest or sleep. Avoid reminiscing or watching TV in bed.
- Hide the bedroom clock; only use it as an alarm, and certainly don't clock-watch at night.
- A warm milky drink (i.e. Ovaltine) helps promote sleep.
- A change in your bedroom environment may help. If you are sensitive to your partner's presence then get a king size bed. For some people changing the orientation of the bed or the smell of detergent or the introduction of a perfume or air freshener are enough to provide a welcome change.

Cultivate a bedtime ritual

- Unwind throughout the evening. Do not take on extra stress or worries in the lead up to bedtime.
- Relaxation – have a habit of reading, listening to light music, or other pleasurable activity. Consider playing a relaxation or meditation tape.
- Keep a bedside diary to put down any annoying or persisting thoughts.

Set your body clock

- Get to bed and get out of bed at a regular fixed time (even on weekends) - this is vital.
- Try to regularise sleep times as much as possible, even if you have shift work or have mandatory irregular sleep times. Shift workers should obtain 'blue light-blocking' glasses for the early morning commute home.
- Expose yourself to morning sunlight (i.e. between 9:00am and 12:00 noon), which helps regulate your sleep/wake cycle. Try to walk outside during the middle of the day if possible.
- Source a Blue Light for rental or purchase, e.g. GoLite Blue, Luminettes.
- Avoid daytime naps. Make alternative arrangements during the times that you are likely to nap.
- Lights out immediately when you retire.

INSOMNIA (difficulty falling asleep) – Additional Strategies

- If you have insomnia, do not go to bed too early and do not have a fixed bed time initially until a routine sleep pattern emerges. It will cause additional anxiety if you cannot fall asleep. If you are not tired, it is hard to retire.
- Sleep Restriction Strategy: Estimate how much sleep you need to feel well. Then every night afterwards restrict yourself to this figure but minus half an hour, e.g. if you feel you need 7.5 hours to feel well, limit your time in bed to 7 hours. Do this for a week, preferably a month, then see what happens.
- If you are unable to fall asleep after about 20 minutes (arbitrary), get up and do something relaxing until you are 'sleepy-tired' again. Avoid a very stimulating activity; consider using lower lighting or a mindless activity, such as flicking through a magazine.
- Avoid fretting or worrying as it will only make the situation worse and is very counter-productive.
- Working with a motivational Sleep Psychologist will help in most situations. We work with trusted sleep psychologists and counsellors that we can recommend.
- Write your plans for the next day or list your concerns and worries into a diary, kept in your bedroom, or kept outside of the bedroom to be filled in before going to bed.
- Skip a night's sleep if you are still awake well into the night. However the next day do not nap, and go to bed at your usual bedtime.
- Consider using medications such as over-the-counter anti-histamines or herbal remedies.
- Melatonin or prescription medications such as Stilnox can be used periodically. Again, avoid using alcohol to induce sleep.
- A review for anxiety and depressive symptoms from a sleep-orientated psychiatrist.

Other aids for Insomnia

- White noise, ocean or waterfall music, etc.