



Ways to Improve Sleep

Cut down on caffeine

Caffeine drinkers may find it difficult to fall asleep. Once they drift off, their sleep is shorter and lighter. For some people, a single cup of coffee in the morning means a sleepless night.

People who suffer from insomnia should avoid caffeine since its effects can last for many hours. Because caffeine withdrawal can cause headaches, irritability, and fatigue, some people find they need to cut back gradually. Those who can't or don't want to give up caffeine should avoid it after 2 PM, or noon if they are especially sensitive. Don't forget the many teas, chocolate and cola drinks contain caffeine.

Stop Smoking or Chewing Tobacco

Nicotine is a central nervous stimulant that can cause insomnia. It is harder to fall asleep because your heart rate speeds, blood pressure rises, and brain waves are stimulated. In people who are addicted, a few hours without it is enough to cause withdrawal and craving can cause wake a smoker. If you continue to smoke, stop at least one to two hours before bedtime.

Go easy with the alcohol

Alcohol depresses the nervous system, so having a drink helps some people fall asleep. But the quality of the sleep is not normal. REM sleep is suppressed, and the sedative effects disappear in a few hours. People who drink awaken often and sometimes have frightening dreams and alcohol may cause 10% of chronic insomnia cases. Also, alcohol can cause snoring and other breathing problems because it relaxes throat muscles and interferes with normal brain activity.

Drinking during a normally sleepy time, in the mid-afternoon or at night will cause more sleepiness than at other times of the day. This can be dangerous as even one drink can make someone who is sleep deprived dangerous behind the wheel.

Get Exercise

Regular exercise like walking, running, or swimming helps you fall asleep faster, and get a better quality of sleep. This is especially true for older people and active older men can fall asleep in half the time it takes for sedentary peers.

Exercise is the only known way for healthy adults to boost the amount of deep sleep. But avoid exercise within two hours of bedtime because it is stimulating and can make it harder to fall asleep.

Improve your sleep surroundings

Use your bed only for sleeping or sex and replace worn or uncomfortable mattresses. Do not watch TV in bed, use the phone, or have office equipment close at hand. Removing them reinforces that the bedroom is meant for sleeping. A quiet, dark, and relatively cool environment, with a comfortable bed and little clutter is ideal. Leave stressful reminders in another room.

Only go to bed when you are sleepy. If you do not fall asleep in 15 minutes or wake up and cannot get back to sleep, get up and do something relaxing until you feel drowsy.

Keep a regular sleep schedule

Regular sleep keeps the circadian sleep wake cycle, or you inner clock in sync. Those with the most regular sleep habits have the fewest problems with insomnia and depression. Get up at about the same time every day, even after a late night out, or poor sleep. Daytime naps can also cause make it harder to get to sleep.

- Keep a sleep diary – You may uncover some factors that are disrupting your sleep. This is best done for a month, though even a logging for a week can be a help.
- Use Scheduled Naps – If you need to sleep longer at nights, naps are not good. But if you need to increase alertness during the day, a scheduled nap may be the right way to go. Sometimes insomniacs are anxious about getting enough sleep, so a planned nap can improve sleep by reducing anxiety. Napping for no longer than an hour, or even 15 to 20 minutes can give a real boost. If the nap causes grogginess that lingers, the time should be shortened.

Additional Considerations

Limit fluids before bedtime to minimize nighttime trips to the bathroom. Take a hot bath before bed, and use relaxation techniques before bedtime.