

Sleep Hygiene for Adults



Tossing and turning at night? You're not alone. Many adults struggle to get the recommended average 7 hours of sleep each night. Enter: sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene is a series of habits that can help you get to sleep and stay asleep through the night. Why is it important? Getting quality sleep regularly can help improve both your physical and mental health.

The benefits of sleep hygiene

Improving your sleep habits can better your overall well-being. Here's how:

Your physical health. Your body uses sleep as time to repair itself. Your immune system, muscles, and hormone-producing organs are all recovering while you sleep. If you're getting the proper amount of sleep, all of these processes can run efficiently.

In addition, your hormone levels regulate during sleep, including those related to your appetite.

A lack of sleep can disrupt this, leading to fluctuations in eating habits.

Unfortunately, a lot of health issues have been linked to poor sleep. These include a weakened immune system, diabetes, and heart disease. Weight gain has also been associated with a lack of sleep. On the flip side, there's a link between people with healthy sleep habits and a reduced risk of premature death.

Your mental health. While you're sleeping, your brain processes and filters information from your day. This helps your memory and ability to learn new skills. You're also able to function better after getting enough sleep. For example, quality sleep can lead to a more productive day at work and more enjoyable interactions with family and friends. Proper sleep helps regulate moods and emotions as well. Lower levels of sleep have been linked to anxiety and depression.

Your safety. You're more alert after several nights of restorative sleep. This leads to fewer accidents and mistakes. It can be dangerous to drive a car or other heavy machinery while tired. People also tend to be less aware of their surroundings if they haven't had enough sleep.

Practicing sleep hygiene

Follow these tips to create a sleep hygiene practice:

- **Consistency:** Going to sleep at the same time every night and waking up at the same time each day, including on the weekends, trains your body to be ready for the proper amount of sleep each night.
- **Routine:** Creating a relaxing pre-bedtime routine that you do consistently can prepare you to fall asleep. Consider reading a book, doing gentle yoga, or taking a bath. One thing to leave out of your routine is screens. The blue light emitted from phones, computers, and even TVs can disrupt your body's ability to produce melatonin. This is a hormone that helps you sleep.
- **Physical surroundings:** Make sure your bed is comfortable. Your choice of mattress, blanket, and pillow can all help. The temperature of the room, how dark or light it is, and the noise level also play an important role.
- **Eating habits:** Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bed to help you have a good night's sleep.
- **Physical activity:** The more active you are during the day, the more tired you'll be when it's time to go to bed. But avoid strenuous physical activity right before you go to sleep.

Talk with your healthcare provider

If you've created a sleep hygiene practice and you're still having problems sleeping, it's time to talk with your healthcare provider. Be sure to review the medicines you take with your provider. You could be taking something that's interfering with your sleep.

It's also possible you could have a sleep disorder, like insomnia or sleep apnea.

Insomnia is the inability to fall or stay asleep over a period of time. Stress and anxiety can lead to insomnia. You may have it for a short time, like days or weeks. Or it could be long-term insomnia. This type lasts for more than 3 months. If you're experiencing insomnia, talk with your provider. You don't have to suffer through sleepless nights.

Sleep apnea is another common sleep disorder. In sleep apnea, your upper airway gets blocked while asleep. This reduces airflow, making it harder to breathe and interrupting sleep. It can be dangerous if untreated. To determine if you have sleep apnea, you might have to do a sleep study. Talk with your provider if you think you could have sleep apnea.

Sleep isn't just your body hitting the "off" switch. Your body works hard while you're asleep. Set yourself up for the healthiest version of yourself by practicing sleep hygiene. You'll feel better for it!

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