

Ten Tips for better sleep

1. **Lie down to go to sleep ONLY when you are actually sleepy.** For some people, this means that you will go to bed a lot later than usual. Learn to surf the 'sleepy wave' into sleep. Feelings of sleepiness build up then pass like waves. Learn to notice how sleepy you are feeling and go to bed when the wave of tiredness builds to the peak.
2. **Do not use your bed for anything except sleeping.** Do not read, watch TV, eat or worry in bed. Sexual activity is the only exception to this rule. On such occasions, follow the instructions afterwards when you intend to go to sleep. (If you believe that reading, listening to the radio, or some other in-bed activity helps you to fall asleep, feel free to break this rule and read or listen to the radio in bed - but do it for no longer than about 20 minutes).
3. **If you do not fall asleep within about 30 minutes after turning out the light,** get up, go to another room, and do something that is not too arousing (for example, read a magazine, watch TV, do some ironing). Stay up as long as you wish, and then return to your bedroom to sleep. The goal is to associate your bed with falling asleep QUICKLY.
4. **If you return to bed and still cannot sleep,** repeat rule 3. Do this as often as necessary until you fall asleep in about 30 minutes.
5. **If you wake up during the night and cannot go back to sleep,** follow rules 3 and 4.
6. **Get up at about the same time every morning,** 7 days a week, regardless of how long you have slept. This will help your body to develop a consistent sleep rhythm. (If you like to sleep later on weekends, for the 4 to 6 weeks of the programme make sure that you get up not more than 1 hour later on weekends than on weekdays.)
7. **Do not nap during the day.** Even a 5 minute nap in front of TV can take the edge off your sleepiness, and can make it harder for you to sleep well that night.
8. **Most of the *thinking and worrying* that we do in bed needs to be done - it just does not need to be done in bed.** Therefore, make sure that you devote some time during the day (for example, 5 to 60 minutes) for thinking and worrying. This should end at least a couple of hours before you go to bed. Then, when the thoughts come when you are in bed, say to yourself gently: *"Stop, I thought about this today. I will think about it again tomorrow. Now is the time to sleep."*
9. **Do some form of relaxation.** For people who wake during the night and then have trouble falling asleep again, and for people who are light sleepers, relaxation is often the single most important part of this insomnia control programme. The ideal is to do relaxation twice a day for 20 minutes (for example, once in the middle of the day, and once just before bed or in bed). You may use a relaxation tape, do yoga, meditate, or just take quiet time - whatever you prefer. Try relaxing your body into the bed, breathing deeply and letting go of muscle tension, down through your body, from head to toe.
10. **Not before bed:** Caffeine, sugar, excessive exercise, computer, alcohol, cigarettes. These all affect your ability to get to sleep, as well as the quality of your sleep. To get a good night's rest, avoid these for a few hours before you turn in. While alcohol may help you fall asleep, you'll have a disrupted night and feel tired the next day.

If you're still not getting a good night's rest, ensure it's not because of an underlying health condition. Book an appointment with your GP or psychologist.

Source: Dr David Morawetz; Adapted from Australian Family Physician Vol 22, No 3, March 1993.