



15 Tips to a Better Night's Sleep

Sleep problems are a common symptom for people who are recovering from traumatic events. One's usual methods for falling asleep may no longer work. Disturbing thoughts of reenactment, rescue or reunion may interfere with one's sleep cycle. Nightmares and sleep terrors occur in response to adjusting to shattered realities.

Practice "good sleep hygiene". Here are some tips for you to try:

1. No reading or watching TV in bed. These are waking activities. If your insomnia is chronic, it is not a good thing to do, says Dr. Alex Clark, Director of Stanford Sleep Disorder Clinic in Palo Alto, CA.
2. Go to bed when you're sleepy-tired, not when it's time to go to bed by habit.
3. Wind down during the second half of the evening before bedtime. Don't get involved in any kind of anxiety-provoking activities of thought 90 minutes before retiring to bed.
4. Do some breathing exercises or try to relax major muscle groups. Start at the toes and work up the body all the way to the forehead.
5. Your bed is for sleeping, so if you cannot sleep after 15-20 minutes in bed, get up and do something relaxing.
6. Have your room cool instead of warm.
7. Don't count sheep—counting is stimulating.
8. Exercise in the afternoon or early evening, but no later than three hours before bedtime.
9. Don't overeat or eat two to three hours before bedtime.
10. Try not to nap during the day.
11. If you awake in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep within 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing (no TV or reading anything stimulating).
12. Have no caffeine, alcohol or cigarettes two to three hours before retiring to bed.
13. If you have disturbing dreams or nightmares repeatedly, try to add an ending you enjoy or like better.
14. Keep a sleep journal. Thirty minutes before you go to bed, write down your concerns and hopes. It frees up your sleep from processing your dilemmas.
15. Listen to calming music or recorded sounds (ocean, forest, birds, crickets, brook) before bed.

If sleep problems persist, contact your physician or mental health professional. Let them know what is happening in your life. Your problem may have either organic or psychological contributors. Sleep disorders are considered chronic if they persist over more than one month.