

SLEEP HYGIENE BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES

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Sleep hygiene is a term used to describe good, healthy sleep habits. These behaviors are a critical component of maintaining a restorative night's sleep. Good sleep hygiene practices encompass a range of habits and environmental factors that can significantly impact the quality and duration of your sleep. By implementing these behaviors, you can improve your overall well-being, cognitive function, and productivity. In this handout, we will explore some essential sleep hygiene practices and provide practical tips on how to incorporate them into your daily routine, ensuring you wake up feeling refreshed and ready to take on the day. It is important to practice these behaviors on a consistent basis to see real, long-lasting results.

CREATING A SLEEP FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

1. *Use a comfortable mattress and pillow.* Ensure that your mattress provides adequate support and comfort for your body. Replace old, sagging mattresses and worn-out pillows as needed.
2. *Maintain an optimal room temperature.* The temperature of your bedroom can have a significant impact on your sleep quality. A cooler room, generally between 60-67°F (15-19°C), is often ideal. Experiment with different temperatures to find what works best for you. Using a fan can help with temperature regulation if needed.
3. *Control lighting and noise distractions.* A dark and quiet environment is most conducive to restful sleep. Consider blackout curtains or blinds to block external light sources. If this is not an option, consider using an eye mask while sleeping. Use earplugs or a white noise machine if you live in a noisy area or have disruptive neighbors.
4. *Create a screen-free zone.* The blue light emitted by phones, tablets, and computers can interfere with your body's production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep. It's advisable to avoid screens at least an hour before bedtime (two hours is even better). If you must use these devices, consider using blue light filters or enabling night mode settings. Removing televisions, laptops and smartphones from the bedroom can also promote healthy sleep habits by removing distractions. Instead, read a book, practice relaxation techniques, or engage in calming activities to prepare your mind for rest.
5. *Remember: the bed is for sleeping only!* With the exception of sexual activity, no other activities (reading, TV watching, working, studying, etc.) should be completed in the bed. This helps set up our brain to create a positive association between being in the bed and being sleepy.

ESTABLISHING A CONSISTENT SLEEP SCHEDULE

1. *A daily regular routine is important.* Your body has a natural internal clock, known as the circadian rhythm, which regulates your sleep-wake cycle. By going to bed and waking up at the same times every day, you synchronize your internal clock with the external day-night cycle. This consistency reinforces your body's ability to predict when it should sleep and when it should be awake. Maintaining a regular sleep schedule is crucial for ensuring restorative sleep. When you have a consistent bedtime and wake

time, your body can complete the necessary sleep cycles, including deep and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which are essential for physical and mental rejuvenation.

2. *Set a bedtime and wake time.* Choose a bedtime that allows you to get the recommended amount of sleep for your age group. Adults generally require 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Likewise, set a consistent wake-up time, even on weekends. While it may be tempting to sleep in on days off, maintaining a consistent wake time helps regulate your body's internal clock. If you do have to make up for lost sleep, it's better to adjust your bedtime rather than your wake time.
3. *Avoiding sleeping in on the weekends.* Oversleeping on weekends can disrupt the regular sleep pattern you've established during the week. It can lead to a phenomenon known as "social jetlag," where your body experiences a misalignment between your weekday and weekend sleep schedules, similar to the jetlag experienced when traveling across time zones. If you find yourself needing more sleep on weekends, consider napping for a short period (20-30 minutes) rather than sleeping in excessively. This can help you catch up on lost sleep without interfering with your circadian rhythm.

Note: Gradually adjust your sleep schedule if you need to change it. Sudden shifts can disrupt your circadian rhythm and lead to difficulties falling asleep and waking up. Try adjusting your bedtime and wake time by 15-30 minutes earlier or later each night until you reach your desired schedule.

USING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO IMPROVE SLEEP

1. *Regular exercise provides numerous benefit for sleep.* Exercise can help reduce the time it takes to fall asleep, improve sleep quality, and extend the duration of deep, restorative sleep. It also has a positive impact on overall health, including cardiovascular health and mental well-being. Physical activity can help reduce symptoms of conditions like insomnia and sleep apnea, making it an essential component of a comprehensive sleep hygiene routine.
2. *When is the optimal time to exercise?* While exercise is generally beneficial for sleep, the timing of your physical activity can influence its effects on your sleep. Vigorous exercise late in the evening, close to bedtime, can increase alertness and make it harder to fall asleep. To optimize the sleep benefits of exercise, aim to finish your workout at least three hours before bedtime. This allows your body temperature to return to its normal baseline, which is conducive to sleep. If you prefer evening workouts, consider gentler activities like yoga or stretching to wind down.

Bonus Tip: Morning or early afternoon exercise can be particularly effective in promoting restful sleep. It provides a natural energy boost during the day and helps you feel more tired at night.

MANAGING DIET AND NUTRITION

1. *What is the impact of food and drink on my sleep?* What you eat and drink, particularly in the hours leading up to bedtime, can significantly affect your sleep. Certain foods and beverages can either facilitate or disrupt your sleep patterns.
 - **Caffeine:** Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, tea, energy drinks, and some sodas. It can interfere with your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Avoid consuming caffeine for at least 10 hours before bedtime.
 - **Alcohol:** While alcohol may initially make you feel drowsy, it can disrupt your sleep patterns. It can lead to fragmented, less restorative sleep and may cause you to wake up during the night. It's best to limit alcohol consumption to at least three hours before bedtime.

- **Heavy meals:** Consuming large, heavy meals right before bedtime can lead to discomfort and indigestion, making it difficult to relax and fall asleep. Aim to finish eating at least a three hours before bedtime, and opt for lighter, easily digestible foods if you need a late-night snack.
2. *Eating patterns can influence your sleep.* In general, it's best to have a well-balanced dinner a few hours before bedtime. Avoid going to bed on an empty stomach, which can cause discomfort, or a very full stomach, which can lead to acid reflux. If you find yourself hungry before bed, consider a small, sleep-friendly snack, such as a banana, a handful of nuts, or a glass of warm milk. These options can provide some essential nutrients without causing sleep disruptions.
 3. *Staying well hydrated is important.* Hydration is important, but try to limit your fluid intake in the evening for at least two hours before bedtime to avoid waking up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. This can disrupt your sleep pattern.

MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY AROUND BEDTIME

1. *Stress reduction techniques can help to improve sleep onset and maintenance.* Stress and anxiety can significantly impact your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. You can use stress-reduction techniques to calm your mind before bedtime. This can include practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and progressive muscle relaxation.
 - **Meditation:** Meditation involves focusing your attention and eliminating the stream of thoughts that can cause stress and anxiety. Regular meditation can reduce symptoms of insomnia and improve sleep quality.
 - **Deep breathing:** Deep, controlled breathing techniques, such as diaphragmatic breathing, can help calm the nervous system and promote relaxation. Practicing deep breathing exercises before bedtime can ease anxiety and improve your sleep.
 - **Guided imagery:** This is a relaxation technique that uses vivid mental images and soothing narration to help individuals calm their minds and achieve a peaceful and restful night's sleep.
2. *Setting aside "worry time" can help with stress at bedtime.* Set aside designated "worry time" earlier in the day to address any concerns or anxieties you may have. By doing this, you can avoid ruminating on worries when it's time to sleep. Create a list of your concerns and work on solutions or strategies during your worry time. As bedtime approaches, remind yourself that you've already allocated time for worry and that it's time to relax and unwind.
3. *Keeping a worry journal can be an effective way to manage stress and anxiety.* Write down your thoughts, worries, and concerns before bedtime. This can help release them from your mind and prevent rumination. Journaling can also be a useful tool for tracking your sleep patterns and identifying any recurring issues that may be affecting your sleep.

Bonus Tip: Don't watch the clock! It can be tempting to check the time when you are struggling to fall asleep, but avoid repeatedly checking the time while in bed as this can exacerbate stress and anxiety related to bedtime.