



Sleep Hygiene

Sleep is a complex activity that is vital to your mental, physical and emotional health. During the deepest stages of sleep the body is able to restore organs, bones and tissue; replenish immune cells and circulate a rejuvenating supply of hormones and chemicals making the body less vulnerable to diseases. Insomnia is defined as having difficulty falling asleep or frequent or early awakening. It is often caused by lifestyle, stress, inability to relax, lack of exercise, poor dietary or sleeping habits, side effects of recreational, prescription and non-prescription drugs or a physical illness.

Studies have shown that proper sleep hygiene is more effective at improving sleep long-term than sleep medications. There are also no negative side effects to practicing proper sleep hygiene.

Mind-Body Connection

- An over active mind, worry, anxiety, distress, depression or unresolved anger is often the root of short-term insomnia. Schedule worry time during the day. Writing down your thoughts or feelings often will break the vicious cycle.
- Exercise, meditate, do yoga or creative visualization to calm your mind.

Lifestyle

- A regular schedule improves sleep. Go to bed and rise at the same time, even on weekends and holidays. If you do shift-work, try to maintain a consistent routine as best as you can
- Stay awake throughout the day, if you do nap keep it less than one hour in length.
- Fluorescent lights (especially blue light from screens) decrease the hormone melatonin which is necessary for sleeping. Change to full spectrum lights, better still spend more time outside, and try not to look at a screen for at least 2 hours before you plan to go to sleep.
- Smoking causes the mind to be more active and can prevent sleep.
- Alcohol interferes with the ability to stay asleep
- Avoid watching stimulating, action-packed TV shows before bed
- If you are struggling to fall asleep, do not get up and stimulate your brain (this includes looking at your phone, laptop, and TV)

Nutrition

- Starchy foods before bedtime tend to raise the level of serotonin in the brain. This often has a sedating effect. Try eating a very small portion of a whole-grain pasta, half a baked potato, apple or a piece of toast half an hour before bed.



- Avoid bedtime snacks that are high in sugar or simple carbohydrates such as breads, cereals, muffins, cookies, or other baked goods prompt short-term spike in blood sugar, followed by a sugar crash later on, which can cause waking during sleep. A good bedtime snack has a bit of protein and fiber in it – a handful of nuts for example.
- Stimulants are the worst offenders. After 11 a.m. eliminate coffee, tea, cola, chocolate and over the counter medications with caffeine.
- Spicy, fatty or gas-producing foods can cause pain or discomfort that affects sleep. Avoid these.
- Try not to consume large quantities of liquids before bed – this can cause the need to urinate during the night.

Exercise

- Exercise on a daily basis to relieve the tension from a hectic day and to assist relaxation of the muscles and mind.
- Avoid strenuous exercise in the evening as it may keep you up.
- Outdoor exercise in nature is best for reducing stress.
- Do gentle stretching before getting into or out of bed.
- To relax the body, take deep, slow breaths with a prolonged exhalation. Another way of relaxing, is to progressively tighten and then relax every muscle in the body starting with your toes and working up to your neck.
- Exercise your mind: try adding Sudoku or a daily crossword to your routine. People who are mentally stimulated during the day feel a need to sleep in order to maintain their performance.

Bedroom

- Keep it cool. A drop in body temperature stimulates sleep.
- Keep it comfortable. If you wake up with more back or neck pain than you went to bed with it is probably time to buy a new mattress or pillow.
- Keep it quiet. If your room is noisy use ear plugs, white noise, a fan or soft music.
- Keep it dark. Melatonin, the main hormone for balancing sleep, needs darkness. Use thick curtains, blinds, or eye masks to ensure maximum darkness.
- Keep it work free. Your bedroom is for sleeping and sex only. Watching television, working on a computer and reading can over stimulate the mind and affect sleep.
- Keep it peaceful. Use soft, calming colours without a lot of clutter and mess.
- Keep it free from distractions. Put your phone into airplane mode, and turn your clock away from view.
- Be aware of electromagnetic fields in your bedroom. They disrupt the pineal gland and production of melatonin and serotonin. EMFs are emitted



- through digital alarm clocks and other electrical devices, so if you use them, leave them a minimum of three feet away from your body. This goes for all electronic devices. If possible, shut off your home wifi at night.
- Create bedroom “Zen”. Try removing clutter, homework, calendars etc. If you can, think about painting the room to earthy tones or making it your relaxing place.
 - Diffuse or sprinkle calming essential oils, such as lavender.
 - Avoid using a loud alarm clock. Waking up suddenly to the blaring wail of an alarm clock can be a shock to your body; you’ll also find you’ll feel groggier when you are roused in the middle of a sleep cycle. If you get enough sleep on a regular basis, an alarm clock will not be necessary, if you do use an alarm, you should wake just before it goes off. Try a sunrise alarm, an alarm clock with natural light build in that simulates a sunrise, OR an alarm that gradually gets louder, or soothing classical music.

Work with your Naturopathic Doctor

- To determine the root cause of your insomnia.
- To identify any triggers that may be contributing and to treat underlying physical ailments.
- To identify specific naturopathic treatments that can support you in addressing your insomnia.