

All About Sleep Hygiene

Insomnia is a common disorder affecting over 60 million people every year in the USA. It costs billions of dollars yearly in healthcare expenses and tens of billions in lost productivity.

Insomnia is a symptom of many illnesses and a contributor to many other disorders. A lack of regular healthy sleep leads to excess stress, trouble concentrating, slowed healing, an impaired immune system, daytime fatigue, and many other health problems.

The rare bout of insomnia can be hard to prevent, but chronic insomnia needs addressing. A useful way to do that and ensure a good night's rest is by learning to carry out good sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene refers to everything we do to help us get a good night's rest. Observing good sleep hygiene isn't a one-time event. Rather, it's a pattern of particular behaviors and habits that promotes consistently good sleep. This includes establishing regular routines that prioritize sleep. All too often we treat sleep as an afterthought, as if it were automatically guaranteed. But like all forms of fitness, healthy sleep requires preparation, and that involves learning to perform great sleep hygiene.

Poor sleep hygiene may result in insomnia or inadequate restful sleep. Poor sleep leads to a lack of energy during the day, trouble concentrating, moodiness, irritability, headaches, and problems with one's memory.

If you're interested in getting better sleep, check out these tips for improving the quality of your sleep hygiene.

1. *Turn your bedroom into a cozy, sleep-supporting environment.* Take the tv out of your bedroom and use your bed only for sleep or sex. When we associate our bedroom or sleeping space with more casual entertainment, like watching our favorite streams, we weaken the association of our sleep-space with actual sleep.
2. *Keep your bedroom cool.* Many people seem to sleep best in a room between 68 and 72 degrees.
3. *No handhelds or other digital devices in bed—it's a no-scrolling environment.* This is a tough one! Everyone checks their phones and tablets while lying in bed, and a quick 2-minute scan is ok—but sticking to that limit can be tough. Before you know it, hours have zipped by and you're lost vital time you could have been resting.
4. *Reduce your exposure to blue light.* Light emitted by handhelds is loaded with blue or blue-white light that promotes wakefulness. This isn't a bad thing, in and of itself. However, staring at a computer or phone screen in bed or before bed can disturb your circadian rhythm by fooling your body into thinking it's daytime. Start reducing your exposure to blue light around 2 hours before bed.

5. *Keep a consistent bedtime.* Having a consistent bedtime trains your body to anticipate cycling down in anticipation of sleep.
6. *Have a set time for getting up.* Many people benefit from getting up at the same time every day. The predictability of a fixed sleeping period helps our biological clock work at its best.
7. *Don't eat a heavy meal within 2 hours of bedtime.* A light snack is ok, but avoid eating a full meal close to bedtime. As well, be mindful of what you drink and eat during the day. Indigestion and gastroesophageal reflux disease are big contributors to sleepless nights. These disorders are often fired by spicy foods.
8. *Refrain from drinking caffeine or alcohol within 6 hours of bedtime.* People have differing levels of tolerance to caffeine. It can remain in your system for up to 8 hours, so it's a good idea to avoid caffeinated beverages before bedtime. Not only can caffeine keep you up, but alcoholic beverages often cause a kind of middle insomnia. That is, people may fall asleep rapidly after having an alcoholic drink, only to wake up later and be unable to return to sleep.
9. *Keep exercise to a minimum before you go to bed.* Intense, vigorous exercise stimulates the release of adrenaline, which promotes alertness and interferes with sleep. A short walk, yoga, tai chi or other low impact exercise is a better choice for evening exercise.
10. *Keep your bedroom quiet and dark.* If you're bothered by outside noise like street sounds, consider using a white noise machine. Blackout curtains and a sleep mask will eliminate excess light from disturbing your sleep.
11. *Invest in a high-quality mattress and pillows.* Worn out mattresses can lead to back, hip and shoulder pain, as well as causing muscle aches. New bedding can be expensive, but there's no question that old, worn-out bedding can make going to sleep difficult.
12. *Avoid or reduce daytime napping.* Don't nap for longer than 30 minutes and don't nap within 6 hours of your bedtime.
13. *Don't toss and turn in bed.* If you're still awake after 20 minutes, get out of bed.
14. *Hide your clock.* If you're prone to clock-watching when you're in bed, hide your clock.
15. *Consider meditation.* Learning to meditate has many rewards, not the least of which is enhanced relaxation, reduced stress and a calmer, more peaceful mind.

By improving your sleep hygiene, you can get the good night's rest you're looking for.