

Goal: to help promote healthy schedule and better sleep

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Title: 5 Steps to Better Sleep

A good night's rest has proven to be one of the most effective ways to a healthier lifestyle. Many people forget just how important it is to get a full night's sleep. In fact, it's just as important (if not more) as maintaining daily exercise and a healthy diet. Just like irregular exercise and food and snack intake can impact you negatively, so can poor sleep habits. However, there are ways to help promote a better night's sleep.

1. Maintain Regular Exercise

Daily exercise is one of the best proven methods to a better sleep cycle. Not only does it reduce symptoms of insomnia, but it also offers more benefits than most drug supplements (such as melatonin). In fact, studies show a regular exercise habit can [reduce](#) time to fall asleep by 55 percent, total night wakefulness by 30 percent, and anxiety by 15 percent while increasing total sleep time by 18 percent. In addition, exercise provided 41 extra minutes of sleep to older adults, nearly halving the amount of time it took them to [fall asleep](#).

However, exercising too late in the day can pose more troubles falling asleep. Exercise stimulates the mind and body, increasing [alertness](#) and hormones such as epinephrine and adrenaline. Therefore, the best times typically include right away in the morning to supply your body energy for the rest of the day, or at least any time prior to two hours before bedtime. The human mind and body need time to wind down in order to fall asleep quicker and longer.

2. Stick to a Consistent Sleep Schedule

Your body's circadian rhythm naturally aligns itself to wake during the day and sleep during the night. It functions on a set loop, which is why going to bed and waking up around the same time each day positively affects long-term sleep quality. Irregular sleep patterns can alter your circadian rhythm as well as your body's [melatonin levels](#), which signal your brain to sleep.

If you struggle with falling asleep, the best method to get into a healthier sleep pattern is going to bed and waking up at similar times. This realigns your body's circadian rhythm, and after several weeks, you may not even need an alarm!

3. Consume Caffeine Earlier in the Day

Many people rely heavily on a cup of coffee (maybe even two or three) to jump start their mornings and get them over that afternoon slump. Caffeine offers numerous benefits, and a single dose can [enhance](#) focus, energy, and sports performance. However, because coffee and other caffeinated beverages such as soda and energy drinks stimulate your nervous system,

consuming it too late in the day may stop your body from naturally relaxing at night and can significantly worsen [sleep quality](#).

Caffeine can stay in your system for roughly six to eight hours, which is why consuming large amounts before 4 p.m. are not recommended—especially to those who already have [trouble sleeping](#) at night or have sensitivities to caffeine. Although, if you do have that afternoon craving of a hot cup of coffee, stick to decaf.

4. Make Daytime Naps a Minimum

Just like not enough sleep can impact you negatively, so can too much sleep. Although a quick power nap can give you that jolt of energy you need to get through the rest of the day, napping for too long can negatively affect your normal sleep pattern. It throws off your internal clock, which then makes it harder to fall asleep at night. In fact, daytime naps can actually make you more tired during the day.

Of course, these effects vary depending on the individual and his or her sleep patterns. However, if you do find you could use a nap, keep it to a maximum of 30 minutes. Studies prove that 30 minutes or less can enhance daytime brain function, while longer naps can negatively affect health and [sleep quality](#).

5. Reduce Evening Blue Light Exposure

Light exposure gives your body energy, making you more alert, which is why it is beneficial during the day. However, too much exposure late in the evening negatively affects your sleep. Like most irregular health patterns, it impacts your internal clock that tells you when it's time to wind down for the night. Electronic devices like cell phones and tablets emit blue light that can trick your brain into thinking it's daytime, which reduces levels of [melatonin](#) and makes it more difficult to fall asleep.

Blue light is arguably the worst form of light exposure, and also one of the hardest to avoid. For most, the last thing you do before you shut down for the evening is look at your phone, whether it's mindlessly scrolling through your Facebook feed or playing your daily word puzzle. There are [several popular methods](#) to reduce nighttime blue exposure, including:

- Wear blue light-blocking glasses
- Stop watching TV and turn off any bright lights two hours before bed
- Install an app that blocks blue light on your smartphone or computer/laptop

These are just five steps to better sleep, but you can find more tips [here](#).