

Sleep Hygiene Guidelines

Good dental hygiene is important in determining the health of your teeth and gums. We all know we are supposed to brush and floss regularly. Those who do so are more likely to have strong, healthy gums and less cavities. Similarly good sleep hygiene is important in determining the quality and quantity of your sleep. Below are guidelines for good sleep hygiene practices. Review these guidelines and evaluate how well you practice good sleep hygiene.

Caffeine: Avoid Caffeine 6-8 Hours Before Bedtime

Caffeine disturbs sleep, even in people who do not think they experience a stimulation effect. Individuals with insomnia are often more sensitive to mild stimulants than are normal sleepers. Caffeine is found in items such as coffee, tea, soda, chocolate, and many over-the-counter medications (e.g., Excedrin). Thus, drinking caffeinated beverages should be avoided near bedtime and during the night. You might consider a trial period of no caffeine if you tend to be sensitive to its effects.

Nicotine: Avoid Nicotine Before Bedtime

Although some smokers claim that smoking helps them relax, but nicotine is a stimulant. The initial relaxing effects occur with the initial entry of the nicotine, but as the nicotine builds in the system it produces an effect similar to caffeine. Thus, smoking, dipping, or chewing tobacco should be avoided near bedtime and during the night. Don't smoke to get yourself back to sleep.

Alcohol: Avoid Alcohol After Dinner

Alcohol often promotes the onset of sleep, but as alcohol is metabolized sleep becomes disturbed and fragmented. Thus, a large amount of alcohol is a poor sleep aid and should not be used as such. Limit alcohol use to small quantities to moderate quantities.

Sleeping Pills: Sleep Medications are Effective Only Temporarily

Scientists have shown that sleep medications lose their effectiveness in about 2 - 4 weeks when taken regularly. Despite advertisements to the contrary, over-the-counter sleeping aids have little impact on sleep beyond the placebo effect. Over time, sleeping pills actually can make sleep problems worse. When sleeping pills have been used for a long period, withdrawal from the medication can lead to an insomnia rebound. Thus, after long-term use, many individuals incorrectly conclude that they "need" sleeping pills in order to sleep normally. Keep use of sleep pills infrequent, but don't worry if you need to use one on an occasional basis.

Regular Exercise

Get regular exercise, preferably 40 minutes each day of an activity that causes sweating. Exercise in the late afternoon or early evening seems to aid sleep, although the positive effect often takes several weeks to become noticeable. Exercising sporadically is not likely to improve sleep, and exercise within 2 hours of bedtime may elevate nervous system activity and interfere with sleep onset.

Hot Baths

Spending 20 minutes in a tub of hot water an hour or two prior to bedtime may promote sleep and is strongly recommended.

Bedroom Environment: Moderate Temperature, Quiet, and Dark

Extremes of heat or cold can disrupt sleep. A quiet environment is more sleep promoting than a noisy one. Noises can be masked with background white noise (such as the noise of a fan) or with earplugs. Bedrooms may be darkened with black-out shades or sleep masks can be worn. Position clocks out-of-sight since clock-watching can increase worry about the effects of lack of sleep. Be sure your mattress is not too soft or too firm and that your pillow is the right height and firmness.

Eating

A light bedtime snack, such a glass of warm milk, cheese, or a bowl of cereal can promote sleep. You should avoid the following foods at bedtime: any caffeinated foods (e.g., chocolate), peanuts, beans, most raw fruits and vegetables (since they may cause gas), and high-fat foods such as potato chips or corn chips. Avoid snacks in the middle of the nights since awakening may become associated with hunger.

If you have trouble with regurgitation, be especially careful to avoid heavy meals and spices in the evening. Do not go to bed too hungry or too full. It may help to elevate your head with some pillows.

Avoid Naps

Avoid naps, the sleep you obtain during the day takes away from your sleep need that night resulting in lighter, more restless sleep, difficulty falling asleep or early morning awakening. If you must nap, keep it brief, and take the nap about 8 hours after arising. It is best to set an alarm to ensure you don't sleep more than 10-15 minutes.

Limit Your Time in Bed

Restrict your sleep period to the average number of hours you have actually slept per night during the preceding week. Quality of sleep is important. Too much time in bed can decrease the quality on subsequent night and contribute to the maintenance of existing sleep problems. Don't lay in bed for extended times not sleep. If you aren't asleep in about 15-20 minutes go ahead and get up. Do something outside the bedroom that is relaxing. When you feel sleepy (i.e., yawning, head bobbing, eyes closing, concentration decreasing, then return to bed. Don't confuse tiredness with sleepiness, they are different. Tiredness doesn't lead to sleep, only sleepiness does.

Regular Sleep Schedule

Keep a regular time each day, 7 days a week, to get out of bed. Keeping a regular awaking time helps set your circadian rhythm set so that your body learns to sleep at the desired time.

Use the attached form to develop a plan for improving your sleep hygiene. It will take time for your sleep to get back in line so once you begin your sleep hygiene plan, stick with it for at least 6-8 weeks.

Planned Improvements of My Sleep Hygiene

Check Those
That Apply

_____ **Avoid Caffeine 6-8 Hours Before Bedtime.** I will not have caffeine after _____ PM.

_____ **Avoid Nicotine Before Bedtime.** I will not have a cigarette after _____ PM.

_____ **Limit Alcohol Use.** I will not have more than _____ drinks in the evening.

_____ **Avoid Use of Sleeping Pills.** (If you are currently using them regularly, all changes should be medical supervised by your medical provider).

_____ **Do Exercise Regularly, But Not Within 2 Hours of Bedtime.** I _____ for _____ minutes, on the following days _____

_____ **Ensure your Bedroom is a Comfortable Temperature, Quiet, and Dark and Your Mattress and Pillow are good.** I will make the following changes to my bedroom _____

_____ **Do Take a Hot Bath 1-2 Hours Prior to Bedtime.** I will take a hot bath about _____ PM.

_____ **Eat a Light Snack at Bedtime but Avoid Large or Problematic Foods.** I will eat _____ or _____ or _____ before bed.

_____ **Avoid Naps.** I try not to nap, if I must, I will limit it to _____ minutes, about 8 hours after I awoke and will use alarm to limit my nap time.

_____ **Limit Time In Bed.** I have been sleeping on average _____ hours per night, therefore I will limit my time in bed to _____ hours (the same number). If I'm not asleep in about 15 to 20 minutes I will get up and not return to bed until I'm sleepy.

_____ **Stay on a Regular Sleep Schedule** I will get up at _____ AM, 7 days a week, no matter how poorly I slept that night.