



Workshop Handout

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Getting Better Sleep

Sleep is regulated by two biological systems: your internal body clock and your sleep drive.

Your **internal body clock** tells you what time to wake up and what time to go to sleep. It sends you alerting signals throughout the day until it's time to go to bed. The alerting signals return shortly before you wake up.

Your **sleep drive** builds up your appetite to fall asleep from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed. When the alerting signals from your internal body clock decrease, your sleep drive takes over and puts you to sleep.

Most insomnia is caused by interfering with this self-regulating system.

Here are some things you can do to get out of your own way and sleep more soundly.

1. **Maintain a regular sleep schedule.** Go to bed and get up at roughly the same time every day. Don't change your bedtime or wake up time by more than about 45 minutes. If you go to bed late, try to get up at the usual time the next day. This will prevent you from interfering with your body clock and sleep drive.
2. **Have a brisk 'wake up.'** Limit snoozing and get up quickly. Snoozing diminishes your sleep drive. Make sure to get natural light within one hour of waking. This reinforces your internal body clock.
3. **Limit napping.** Napping diminishes your sleep drive. It's like snacking between meals. If you have to nap, sleep no longer than 20-30 minutes, and do it early in the afternoon.
4. **Limit alcohol and other substances.** Alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but it makes you sleep less soundly.
5. **Limit caffeine.** Caffeine has a half-life about 4-5 hours. That means that if you have a cup of coffee at 5 PM, your body is still metabolizing half of it 4-5 hours later. It's hard for your sleep drive to compete with that.
6. **Create a bedtime buffer zone.** Dim ambient light about one hour before bedtime. This encourages the release of the hormone melatonin, which makes



you sleepy. Turn off devices, too. They have too much light and can be unnecessarily stimulating.

7. **Limit behavior in bed to sleep and sex.** Do you know that you can inadvertently teach your body to be awake in bed? Keep activities besides sleep and sex out of the bedroom so that you don't condition yourself to be awake when you're in bed. If you can't sleep, get up after 20 minutes and do something boring or relaxing until you feel sleepy again.
8. **Don't "try" to go to sleep.** Trying to sleep is like trying to fall in love. There's no way to make it happen. And trying to fall asleep just makes you more awake. Get up and do something boring or relaxing until you feel sleepy again.
9. **Don't stress about sleep.** People usually overestimate the effects of one night of bad sleep. Start with the assumption that you will be fine. If you get one bad night of sleep, don't try to compensate. Go to bed and get up at the regular time the next day. Remember to let your sleep drive and internal body clock do their jobs.

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