

Sleep: How to help ensure a Restful Night's Slumber

"I can't get to sleep," "I wake up all the time," "I don't get enough sleep at night," "I'm always so tired." If any of these complaints sound familiar, then you are one of many who is probably having difficulty getting enough sleep at night. Whether it's trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, sleep deprivation can wreak all sorts of havoc including fatigue, higher levels of stress and anxiety, lower frustration thresholds, behavior problems, and increased irritability to name a few. Sleep difficulties can also affect one's physical health.

This handout enumerates some often simple strategies to help you find the rest you need. These strategies do not take the place of consulting with a physician if needed or desired, and does not address medical concerns that cause sleeping difficulties such as sleep apnea. However, the strategies in this handout are often helpful for obtaining better quality sleep.

Environment Set-up

- Sleep somewhere that's
 - o Cool
 - o Quiet
 - o Dark
 - o Comfortable
- Turn any clocks so that they can't be seen
 - checking them just increases restlessness

Pre-Bedtime / Sleep Activities

- Have a regular bedtime ritual or routine – this trains your body to know when it's time to relax and get ready for sleep
- Do something calming as part of your routine before sleep (e.g., take a bath or shower, pray, meditate, read something calming like poetry or something that doesn't bring stressors to mind, etc.)
- Do a Calming Mindfulness Activity:
Example: Riding the Waves
 1. Lie down on your back. Allow your head to be propped up enough so you can see your belly. Place something on your belly (hand, book, pillow, whatever works)
 2. Focus on your breath – don't try to control it. Just notice as your belly slowly moves up and down. Watch the object as if it were gently bobbing on the waves of the ocean
 3. When your mind wanders off, gently bring it back to your belly and focus your eyes on the object riding the gentle waves

4. Listen to the sounds of your breath...feel it all together...and just breathe for a few minutes until your breath has slowed down.
5. Now turn out the light and keep your mind focused on the breath, riding the gentle waves, until your mind and body have slowed.

Daytime Do's and Don'ts

- DO
 - o Get some regular exercise
 - o Eat on a regular schedule
 - o Reserve your bed as a sleeping place rather than a place to study, e-mail, surf the Internet, etc.
- DON'T
 - o Exercise within a few hours of bedtime
 - o Eat or drink within a few hours of bedtime
 - o Eat or drink a lot of sugary foods or caffeine – especially for a few hours before bedtime
 - o Play with your phone, iPad, Kindle, Surface, Tablet, or other electronic device for at least a half hour before bedtime

Nighttime Do's and Don'ts

- DO
 - o Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning

- o Consider using earplugs to help make it quiet and reduce aural distractions
- o Consider using an eye mask to help make it dark

- DON'T

- o Check the time (increases anxiety and restlessness)