

SLEEP HYGIENE

Sleep hygiene refers to both your sleep environment and daily behaviors. It involves creating a bedroom environment and daily routines that promote consistent, uninterrupted sleep. It's considered one of the most straightforward ways to help yourself and your family set up for better sleep. Sleep hygiene can be tailored to suit individual needs within the family. It has very little cost and virtually no risk, making it an important part of public health strategies for improving sleep.¹

IMPORTANT FACTS

- Good sleep is essential for our health and emotional well-being.
- Getting enough good quality sleep are crucial for healthy sleep.
- It helps to revitalize the mind and body and prepares you to perform at your best.
- Healthy sleep improves physical and mental health, boosts productivity and enhances overall quality of life.
- Regular exercise makes it easier to sleep and offers many other health benefits.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF ENOUGH SLEEP

Getting enough sleep can help your family:

- Get sick less often.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Reduce stress and improve mood.
- Improve heart health and metabolism.
- Lower the risk of chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.
- Lessen the risk of motor vehicle crashes and related injury or death.
- Improve attention and memory to better perform daily activities.
- Forming good habits makes healthy behaviors feel almost automatic, creating positive reinforcement for sleep.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- While sleep hygiene is very beneficial, it will not cure all sleep problems.
- If you or a family member have long-lasting or severe sleeping problems, or significant daytime sleepiness, it's essential to talk with a doctor or health care provider. Other treatments might be necessary, as sleep hygiene alone isn't a cure-all.
- A health care provider can run tests, including sleep studies, to determine if a sleep disorder like insomnia, restless legs syndrome, narcolepsy or sleep apnea is present.
- Keeping a sleep diary can help identify patterns between behaviors and sleep duration or quality that may be interfering with sleep. Your diary should include when you go to bed, wake up during the night, wake up in the morning, take naps, exercise, drink alcohol or caffeinated drinks and take medications.
- You should also note length and quality of sleep, awakenings and device use.
- Making changes to daily routines can be challenging, so working with a partner or other family members can help in adopting and sticking to recommendations for healthy sleep.^{1,2,3,4}

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HOW TO PRACTICE GOOD SLEEP HYGIENE

SET A CONSISTENT SLEEP SCHEDULE

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, including weekends. A fluctuating schedule prevents getting into a rhythm of consistent sleep. While consistency is healthier, some “catch-up sleep” on weekends might be beneficial after insufficient sleep during the week.
- Prioritize sleep by treating it as a vital part of the day. Calculate a target bedtime based on a fixed wake-up time and aim to be ready for bed around that time nightly.
- If you need to shift sleep times, make gradual adjustments of up to an hour or two at a time to allow bodies to adjust.
- Be mindful of naps. While naps can regain energy, keep them relatively short and limited to the early afternoon to avoid disrupting nighttime sleep. Sleep experts recommend naps of half an hour or less, if needed.

FOLLOW A NIGHTLY ROUTINE

- Keep your routine consistent with the same calming steps each night, like putting on pajamas or brushing teeth, to signal to the brain it’s bedtime.
- Budget 30-60 minutes for winding down before bed. Encourage quiet, calming activities like listening to soft music, gentle stretching, reading for pleasure in soft light, relaxation exercises or a warm bath.
- Dim the lights as bright lights can interfere with melatonin production, a hormone that helps with sleep.
- Unplug from electronic devices. Create a device-free buffer time of 30-60 minutes before bed. Cell phones, tablets and laptops can be mentally stimulating and emit blue light that may reduce melatonin production.
- Don’t toss and turn. If someone hasn’t fallen asleep after about 20 minutes, encourage them to get out of bed and do something calming in low light (like stretching or reading) before trying to sleep again. This helps maintain a strong mental connection between bed and sleep.

SIGNS YOUR FAMILY MIGHT HAVE POOR SLEEP HYGIENE

- Difficulty falling asleep.
- Repeatedly waking up during the night.
- Feeling sleepy or tired even after getting enough sleep.
- An overall lack of consistency in how much or how well your family members are sleeping can also be a symptom.
- Poor sleep hygiene practices are significantly associated with sleep problems, daytime sleepiness and depression. For example, a study showed a significantly higher percentage of subjects with poor sleep hygiene (76.5%) reported sleeping problems in the past three months compared to those with good sleep hygiene (56.1%).

CULTIVATE HEALTHY DAILY HABITS

- Get daylight exposure. Natural light, especially sunlight, helps regulate the body's natural sleepwake cycle (circadian rhythms).
- Be physically active. Regular exercise can make it easier to sleep at night and offers many other health benefits. For some, exercising within two hours of bedtime can interfere with sleep, while for others, evening exercise is fine; experiment to find what works best.
- Avoid smoking. Nicotine is a stimulant that can disrupt sleep.
- Reduce alcohol consumption. While alcohol might seem to help fall asleep, its effects wear off and can disrupt sleep later in the night. It's best to moderate consumption and avoid it in the evening. Alcohol can also worsen snoring and reduce REM sleep.
- Limit caffeine. As a stimulant, caffeine can keep you awake, so try to avoid it in the afternoon and evening.
- Don't dine late. Eating large, heavy or spicy meals close to bedtime can make it hard to sleep because the body is still digesting. Any snacks before bed should be light. Evening meals should be consumed at least three hours before bedtime.

RECOMMENDED SLEEP DURATION BY AGE

- Newborns (0–3 months): 14–17 hours.
- Infants (4–12 months): 12–16 hours.
- Toddlers (1–2 years): 11–14 hours.
- Preschool (3–5 years): 10–13 hours.
- School age (6–12 years): 9–12 hours.
- Teens (13–17 years): 8–10 hours.
- Adults (18–60 years): 7 or more hours.

OPTIMIZE YOUR BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Restrict in-bed activity: Encourage using the bed primarily for sleep (with the exception of sex) to strengthen the mental link between the bed and sleeping. Keep electronic devices and work-related items in another room.
- Ensure a comfortable mattress and pillow: Your sleeping surface is crucial for comfort and pain-free sleep. Replace them if they are worn or uncomfortable.
- Use excellent bedding: Choose sheets and blankets that are comfortable and suit your preferences.
- Set a cool, comfortable temperature: Most people sleep better in a slightly cool room, aiming for around 65-68 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Block out light: Use heavy curtains, shades or an eye mask to prevent light from interrupting sleep.
- Drown out noise: Earplugs, a white noise machine or a fan can help block bothersome sounds.
- Heavy curtains and rugs can also absorb sound.
- Try calming scents: Light, soothing smells like lavender may help create a more relaxed and positive sleep space.

RESOURCES TO HELP

- thensf.org/sleep-health-topics
- sleepeducation.org
- extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/promoting-healthy-sleeping-habits-in-children-and-adolescents.html
- Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is a short, structured, and evidence-based approach to combating the frustrating symptoms of insomnia. sleepfoundation.org/insomnia/treatment/cognitive-behavioral-therapy-insomnia

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