

Sleep Improvement Guidelines

- **Establish a sleep routine** – Have regular bedtime and waking hours by going to bed when sleepy, at a relatively consistent time, and getting up at the same time each day to synchronize your body clock.
- **Create a comfortable room** – Make sure your room is dark, quiet, and cool but comfortable. In most cases, room temperatures below 54 degrees Fahrenheit and above 75 degrees Fahrenheit will disrupt sleep.¹¹ Also, keep the room well ventilated.
- **Unwind before bedtime** – Allow at least one hour to unwind before bedtime¹² by avoiding, during that time, stimulating activities such as watching a movie, reading an intense book, having emotional discussions, or playing competitive games like chess.
- **Exercise regularly** – A study by Reid et al. (2010)¹³ indicate that engaging in moderate aerobic physical activity generally improves “sleep quality, mood, and quality of life in older adults with chronic insomnia.” Get regular exercise in the afternoon or early evening, but avoid it close to bedtime.¹²
- **Getting bright light at the right time** – Early bright light exposure is very helpful in synchronizing your body clock and helping to wake you in the morning—the best source is sunlight.³ If you can’t get outdoors early in the morning, have breakfast near a window or on a balcony, porch, or patio. The timing of bright light exposure might be adjusted to late afternoon or evening by a sleep medicine physician if a patient has certain difficulties, such as falling asleep too early, working late shifts, or traveling by air frequently.¹⁴
- **Avoid alcohol near bedtime** – Consuming alcohol near bedtime fragments and disrupts sleep.¹² Also, a study indicates that stopping alcohol consumption at bedtime can improve sleep conditions.¹⁵
- **Avoid caffeine near bedtime** – Avoid caffeinated foods and beverages (coffee, tea, chocolate, sodas, or colas) close to bedtime since caffeine is a stimulant and disturbs sleep.¹⁶ The effects of caffeine can remain in the body for three to five hours.¹⁷
- **Avoid smoking** – Avoid smoking and other tobacco products within two hours of bedtime since nicotine is a stimulant that disturbs sleep.¹² Better yet, let help our patients to quit smoking for all the health benefits.
- **Avoid excess fluids near bedtime** – Avoid excess consumption of fluids within two hours of bedtime to prevent frequent bathroom trips at night.¹⁶ Also, empty your bladder (and bowels, if necessary) before going to sleep to prevent bathroom trips that can interfere with sleep.
- **Create a sleep routine** – For example, the patient can try powering down all your electronic devices, washing the hands and face and brushing and flossing the teeth, smelling some lavender essential oils, gently massaging the neck, back, and foot for one minute, or taking a moment of personal reflection to be grateful for another day.

SLEEP FOR HEALTH

Chronic sleep problems can increase your risk of heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, and other medical problems. A person could lose sleep because he or she is experiencing pain, taking certain medications, or undergoing hormonal changes (such as menopause). Quality of sleep is considered good when a person can fall asleep relatively quickly (within 5 to 15 minutes), wake up easily, stay asleep almost continuously, and sleep long enough to feel refreshed the next day.²

The following are some of the results of sleep deprivation:^{3,4,5}

- Daytime fatigue, low energy, physical and mental tiredness, and weariness
- Mood disturbances
- Impaired cognitive functioning
- Impaired memory and concentration
- Difficulty sustaining attention with tasks
- Slowed response times (good reaction times are critical for safe driving, safety at work, and preventing falls)
- Increased incidence of colds and viruses, and a weakened immune system
- Increased pain perception
- Increased risk of falls
- Decreased job performance
- Reduced quality of life and inability to enjoy social relationships
- A possible role in the current obesity epidemic
- Decreased safety on the road, leading to car crashes

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) recommends that “Adults should sleep 7 or more hours per night on a regular basis to promote optimal health.” The consensus statement from the AASM also indicates that “Sleeping less than 7 hours per night on a regular basis is associated with adverse health outcomes, including weight gain and obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and stroke, depression, and increased risk of death. Sleeping less than 7 hours per night is also associated with impaired immune function, increased pain, impaired performance, increased errors, and greater risk of accidents.”⁶